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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

TO ADVANCE A RACE:

A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERSECTION OF PERSONAL BELIEF,
INDUSTRIAL PHILANTHROPY AND BLACK LIBERAL ARTS HIGHER
EDUCATION IN FAYETTE MCKENZIE'S PRESIDENCY AT FISK UNIVERSITY,
1915-1925

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

CHRISTOPHER L. NICHOLSON

CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2011

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My grandfather, who instilled in me a curiosity and love of learning.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation used archival and historical methods to examine Fayette Avery McKenzie's tenure as President at Fisk University from 1915-1925. Specifically, this project investigates the influence McKenzie's work with Native Americans, industrial philanthropy, and American culture of the period played in McKenzie's administration. The research seeks to provide a more complete narrative of McKenzie's administration that is absent from current scholarship, and examine how McKenzie's work at Fisk helped advance Black liberal arts higher education. Analysis of McKenzie's personal papers and other primary and secondary sources provide a strong scholarly basis to examine his administration from multiple perspectives. Through an enhanced understanding of the forces that shaped McKenzie's presidency, the research will contribute to existing scholarship on the history of higher education in the United States (and specifically histories of Black higher education and Fisk University), industrial philanthropy in Black higher education, and presidential leadership at Black colleges and universities in the Progressive Era.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Fayette A. McKenzie's place in historical scholarship is one of contrasts. During a six decade career in education spanning from 1897-1941, he was one of a handful of men intimately involved in the effort to educate and advance socio-culturally two of the United States' most marginalized groups early in the early twentieth century: Native Americans and African Americans. While scholars applaud his work and contributions on behalf of Native Americans, they harshly criticize his efforts among African Americans. Indeed, tenor of the scholarship regarding McKenzie's career largely demarcates along the racial group with whom he worked.

Born in 1872 in Montrose, Pennsylvania, Fayette McKenzie graduated from Lehigh University and taught a variety of subjects at Juniata College prior to pursuing his Ph.D. in sociology and economics at the University of Pennsylvania in 1900. In 1903, he took a position for nine months as a teacher on the Wind River Indian reservation in Wyoming. Two years later, he accepted a position as an associate professor of economics and sociology at The Ohio State University, continued his work with Indians, and completed a Ph.D. in 1908, self-publishing his dissertation, *The American Indian in Relation to the White Population of the United States*. One of the few sociologists of his generation to focus his research on Native Americans, McKenzie was a leading White

voice in America advocating for Indian civil and political rights.¹ In 1911, he co-founded with six other Native Americans the Society of American Indians (SAI), the nation's first pan-tribal Indian advocacy organization designed to advance the political, cultural, legal, and economic interests of Native Americans.

Contemporary scholars examining the Indian movement in the early decades of the twentieth century routinely praise McKenzie's work with Native Americans, and he played an important role in the SAI's early success. His writings on Indian policy display a deep and comprehensive understanding of Indian affairs, and his ideas for Indian advancement parallel many of the reform efforts undertaken years later. He urged White policymakers to grant Indians citizenship status, and encouraged academicians to focus their research on Indian issues. Historian Hazel Hertzberg characterized Indian scholars' common impression of McKenzie's when she described him as "a modest man of great tact and sensitivity, intensely concerned with Indian welfare, who believed in the inherent equality of Indians and whites."²

In addition to his involvement with the SAI, McKenzie served in various capacities on government committees studying Indian issues and policy, including the Advisory Council on Indian Affairs, a group of leading public figures – both Native American and White – assembled to review and advise President Warren G. Harding's

1 Frederick Hoxie, *The Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate Indians – 1880-1902* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 133.

2 Hazel Hertzberg, "Nationality, Anthropology, and Pan-Indianism in the Life of Arthur C. Parker (Sencea)," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 123, no. 1 (20 February 1979): 59.

administration on Indian policy.³ In 1910, he served as one of two “special expert agents” selected to conduct a census of the Indian population for the United States Bureau of the Census. The completed report, *The Indian Population in United States and Alaska*, represented the most comprehensive analysis of Indian populations ever undertaken at the time.⁴ Over a decade later, McKenzie was appointed a lead investigator and author of the influential Meriam Report.⁵

In 1915 McKenzie left Ohio State to become President of Fisk University, a Black college in Nashville, Tennessee founded shortly after the Civil War by the American Missionary Association. Fisk offered academic programs from grade school through college, and its focus on a liberal arts curriculum distinguished it from other Black colleges that pursued an industrial education model.⁶ Despite its progressive approach, Fisk struggled financially, and its campus on the far outskirts of Nashville reflected the indifferent or hostile attitude many white Nashvillians took toward Fisk’s students, faculty, and staff. McKenzie pursued an ambitious plan to secure Fisk’s financial foundation, increase academic standards, and expand programs. Aided and supported by northern industrial philanthropists, he completed a \$1 million endowment campaign (\$14

3 United States Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work assembled the Council, often referred to as the Committee of One Hundred, in 1923 and appointed McKenzie chairman of the resolutions subcommittee.

4 The other “special expert agent” was Roland B. Dixon of Harvard, a noted anthropologist. The report was completed in 1914.

5 McKenzie served as a staff member of The Institute for Government Research Studies in Administration at Johns Hopkins University. In 1926 Secretary Work commissioned the Institute to draft a survey on Indian Affairs. Completed in 1928 and titled, *The Problem of Indian Administration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), the report was the first general study of Indian affairs since the 1850s. The survey is commonly referred to as the Meriam Report after Lewis Meriam, technical director of the survey team that compiled data for the report.

6 The two foremost institutions pursuing industrial education were Hampton Institute, founded by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, and Tuskegee Institute, whose principal for several years was Booker T. Washington.

million in 2010 dollars), secured White Southern support for Fisk, raised the University's academic profile and reputation, and implemented a campus culture characterized by strict policies for student conduct and discipline, and a focus on simplicity and economy in student life. McKenzie's strict student regulations and outreach to Southern Whites slowly alienated him from influential segments of Fisk's Black constituency, including Fisk alumnus W.E.B. DuBois. Frustrated by McKenzie's policies, DuBois and several Fisk students sought redress from the administration and Fisk's board of trustees. When these efforts proved unsuccessful, the students staged a campus-wide uprising in early 1925, during which McKenzie called in the Nashville police to quell the disturbance. Alarmed at McKenzie's action, and determined to effect change, the students walked out of classes in protest. Unwilling to negotiate with the students, and in danger of losing the support of key White stakeholders, including philanthropists and trustees, McKenzie resigned in April, 1925.

Scholarship that examines McKenzie's tenure at Fisk primarily focuses on the last tumultuous year of his administration, with particular emphasis on the events immediately preceding and following the 1925 student protest and strike that led to his resignation. The common narrative portrays McKenzie not as a progressive leader of a minority movement, as scholars portray his work with Indians, but as a sinister leader committed to stifling Black uplift and sympathetic to White Southern interests. Most scholars analyze McKenzie's administration largely through the lenses of industrial philanthropy, his approach to student conduct and discipline, and the Fisk student strike of 1925. They use these limited frames to assess McKenzie's character, personal beliefs

toward race relations, his philosophy of Black higher education, and his effectiveness as President.

Most historians studying McKenzie's administration use a litany of unflattering adjectives to describe the man and his policies: racist, tyrannical, autocratic, aloof, arrogant, aristocratic, egotistical, insensitive, and self-righteous.⁷ Some ignore, trivialize, or distort facts, accomplishments, and important contextual information crucial to an understanding of McKenzie and his administration.⁸ Of the four historians who have written most extensively about McKenzie's administration, three of them – James D. Anderson, Lester Lamon, and Raymond Wolters – focus nearly exclusively on the Fisk

7 James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill, NC.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 285-268.; David J. Goldberg, *Discontented America: The United States in the 1920s* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 105.; Lester Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville and the Fisk University Student Strike of 1924-1925," *The Journal of Southern History* 40 (May 1974): 231.; V.P. Franklin, "Whatever Happened to the College-Bred Negro?" *History of Education Quarterly* 24 (Autumn, 1984): 413.; Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus: Black College Rebellions of the 1920s* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 41.; Eric S. Yellin, "The (White) Search for (Black) Order: The Phelps-Stokes Fund's First Twenty Years, 1911-1931," *Historian* 65 (2002): 349.

8 Perhaps the most egregious erroneous information comes from author Mark Robert Schneider, who writes that McKenzie was "fully committed" to the industrial education model. Mark Robert Schneider, *African Americans in the Jazz Age: A Decade of Struggle and Promise*. (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 51. This assertion is a glaring contradiction to the prevailing – and well documented – scholarship that posits McKenzie was a staunch believer in classical liberal arts higher education for blacks. See Joe M. Richardson, *A History of Fisk University, 1865-1946* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 73.; Patrick Miller, "To Bring the Race along Rapidly: Sport, Student Culture, and Educational Mission at Historically Black Colleges during the Interwar Years," *History of Education Quarterly*. 35 (Summer, 1995): 125.; Wolters, *A New Negro*, 30-31. Nearly as disturbing is James D. Anderson's characterization that McKenzie believed blacks were "particularly sensuous beings who needed to be subjected to firm control." Anderson offers no citation for his assertion, and nothing can be found in the literature to support his conclusion. James D. Anderson, "Philanthropic Control Over Private Black Higher Education," in *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad*, ed. Robert F. Arnove (Boston: G.K.Hall & Co., 1980), 168. Marybeth Gasman proclaims that McKenzie, in response to a 1923 General Education Board memo seeking additional funds for Fisk, curtailed the liberal arts curriculum, although Grassman provides no evidence to support her claim. See Marybeth Grassman, "A Renaissance in Nashville: Charles S. Johnson's Use of Philanthropy to Build Fisk University in the Post-War Period" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2000), 32.

student protests of 1924-1925, and/or the negative role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk.^{6,9}

Only Joe Richardson, in his history of Fisk University, attempts to situate McKenzie's presidency in a larger context. The limited nature of the scholarship regarding McKenzie's administration has evolved into a standard interpretation historians have taken at face-value, and seems to retard further scholarly analysis. Unfortunately, the research and conclusions on which the interpretation is based lack depth and breadth important to an accurate understanding of the situation and time period.

Existing scholarship completely ignores McKenzie's work with Native Americans and largely overlooks his reputation as a progressive reformer and influential White scholar of Indians. In fact, no scholarly examination exists of McKenzie's administration in the context of his work and writings on Indians. Further, scholars generally fail to take into full account the turbulent socio-cultural and political environments during McKenzie's administration, when World War I, anti-communist sentiment, labor turmoil, educational accreditation movements, increasing racial tension and violence, and growing self-determination among Blacks coalesced throughout much of America, the latter two trends especially prominent within the South. Existing scholarship often fails to examine circumstances at other Black liberal arts colleges in the South that, in many respects, mirrored challenges at Fisk.¹⁰ Moreover, scholars rarely examine McKenzie's vision to

9 Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*; Anderson, "Philanthropic Control Over Private Black Higher Education"; James D. Anderson, "Northern Philanthropy and the Training of the Black Leadership: Fisk University, a Case Study, 1915-1930," in *New Perspectives on Black Educational History*, ed. James D. Anderson and Vincent P. Franklin (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co.); Anderson, "Training the Apostles of Liberal Culture: Black Higher Education, 1900-1935," in *The History of Higher Education*, 2nd ed., edited by Lester F. Goodchild and Harold S. Weschsler, (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing). Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville"; Richardson, *A History of Fisk*; Wolters, *A New Negro*.

10 Raymond Wolters, *The New Negro on Campus*, is a notable exception.

position Fisk as the premier Black liberal arts college in the world, and how that goal informed his priorities as President. Finally, scholarship that situates McKenzie's administration in a comprehensive framework that integrates his work with Native Americans, the role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk, the context of the period, and his vision for Fisk University is absent entirely. In sum, the existing literature regarding McKenzie's tenure at Fisk is too narrowly defined, too over reliant on a common scholarly narrative, and riddled with too many important gaps to provide a comprehensive understanding of his presidency.

Existing scholarship regarding Fayette McKenzie consists of two starkly different narratives largely detached from each other, one of a benevolent crusader working tirelessly to help uplift America's indigenous peoples, and the other of a racist tyrant intent on extinguishing black self-determination. This limitation in the existing literature perpetuates a narrow and unbalanced treatment of McKenzie's tenure at Fisk, and a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis is needed.

The Study

This study provides a more accurate and complete understanding of McKenzie's presidency by exploring the interrelationships among four powerful influences that shaped his administration. Three of these factors – McKenzie's work and writings on behalf of Native Americans, the environmental context of the period, and McKenzie's priorities at Fisk – are largely overlooked by scholars, with the fourth – the role of industrial philanthropy in his administration – well documented, but its underlying motives somewhat misunderstood.

I situate McKenzie's presidency within a more comprehensive historical narrative, and examine how socio-cultural circumstances, industrial philanthropic assistance and motivations, and McKenzie's work and study with Indian influenced his administration. I also explore how McKenzie's personal values and his vision for Fisk University shaped his presidency. Examining important facets of McKenzie's administration in relation to one another – instead of exploring them as distinct and disparate elements – provides a more balanced, nuanced, and contextually-appropriate analysis. Further, examining McKenzie and his presidency through several perspectives expands the existing scholarship that focuses primarily on the last year of his administration, and significantly broadens the foundation on which previous scholarship relied. Finally, the analysis analyzes how McKenzie juggled competing priorities, balanced short-term necessities with long-term aspirations, and reconciled his personal beliefs and convictions with the challenges facing Fisk and Black higher education.

I approach my investigation of McKenzie and his administration through three interrelated inquiries. First, I explore parallels between McKenzie's work with Native Americans and African Americans, and consider how and in what ways McKenzie's approach toward Native American uplift and advancement informed his administrative practice as Fisk President. Second, I examine McKenzie's presidency from the context of the period, and explore contextual influences on McKenzie's administration and policies, including how and in what ways Fisk's Christian heritage, location in the South, and cultural, social, and political circumstances in the United States during 1914-1925 impacted McKenzie's administration and policies. I also investigate the policies of other

Black colleges at the time and compare them to those at Fisk. Finally, I explore the role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk during McKenzie's administration, the factors that led McKenzie to aggressively pursue industrial philanthropy, to what extent McKenzie shared similar beliefs with the philanthropists on race and race relations, and to what extent industrial philanthropy influenced McKenzie's administration. This more comprehensive scholarly approach contributes materially and theoretically to the history of higher education, particularly Black higher education, the intersection of northern philanthropy and Black liberal arts higher education, the context of Black higher education in the South, and the history of Fisk University between 1915-1925.

The study's analysis relies on several important primary sources, including McKenzie's published writings and his private papers, which are located at Fisk University Library's Special Collections, and at the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) in Nashville.¹¹ However, the limited scope of material in McKenzie's papers relating to certain topics explored in this dissertation proved insufficient for a comprehensive analysis. I resolved this issue when, during the normal course of research, I discovered the papers of L. Hollingsworth Wood. Wood, a lawyer in New York City who volunteered with several organizations promoting black uplift, joined Fisk's Board in 1917 and quickly assumed the role of Vice Chairman. In this role, Wood frequently corresponded with McKenzie on all matters of University business, and he fastidiously archived his correspondence. Wood's papers, housed at Haverford College,

¹¹ Nettie McKenzie, through the agency of her daughter, Mary Elizabeth Roberts, donated her husband's personal papers to the Tennessee State Library and Archives in August, 1960. The majority of McKenzie's personal papers at the TSLA contain writings and correspondence after he left Fisk.

his alma mater, provided a rich and comprehensive repository of information regarding McKenzie's administration from 1917 to his resignation in 1925.

In addition to personal papers, I also accessed period periodicals, including Fisk University's bi-monthly magazine, the *Fisk University News*, W.E.B. DuBois's *The Crisis* and the *Fisk Herald*, and Nashville's two newspapers of the period, the *Nashville Globe* and *Nashville Banner*.

To examine McKenzie's work with Indians and the Society of American Indians (SAI), I accessed the Papers of the Society of American Indians, and the SAI's quarterly publication, *The American Indian Magazine*, for which McKenzie occasionally contributed content. I also examined McKenzie's writings on Indians, which provided important information on his evaluation, analysis, and ideas of addressing and solving the "Indian Problem."

An important inquiry of the study examines the role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk during McKenzie's administration, and specifically the impact of the General Education Board (GEB). To gain an understanding of the Board, its approach to Black higher education in the South, and its relationship with Fisk both prior to and during McKenzie's administration, I explored GEB Papers at the Rockefeller Archives Center (RAC) in Sleepy Hollow, New York. I also accessed papers related to the Julius Rosenwald Fund, another major industrial philanthropy, at Dillard University in New Orleans, Louisiana.

This dissertation represents a more complete study of the influences on McKenzie's administration and practice at Fisk than existing scholarship. Chapter Two

explores McKenzie's writings on and work with Indians, including his role with the Society of American Indians, and particularly his relationship with Arthur Parker, the SAI's Secretary and Editor of *The American Indian Magazine*. In addition, I examine McKenzie's administrative approach toward influencing and effecting change within the Society and its platform.

Chapter Three investigates the influence of industrial philanthropy at Fisk since the University's founding, with particular attention to the role of the General Education Board in the funding of Black liberal arts higher education generally, and at Fisk specifically. I explore how philanthropic influence impacted McKenzie's administration beyond the financial resources provided to Fisk.

Chapter Four examines how Fisk's founding by the American Missionary Association and its location in the South significantly shaped its history and McKenzie's presidency. Further, it explores in what ways the country's significant cultural, social, and political turmoil in the late 1910s and early 1920s influenced McKenzie's administration, and examines the state of student conduct and discipline policies at other Black colleges.

This dissertation focuses on Fayette McKenzie's writings and work with Native Americans and specifically his role within the Society of American Indians, the role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk University, broader contextual issues impacting Black higher education, and the role these factors played in his presidency at Fisk. Although McKenzie worked on other Indian projects throughout his lifetime, I chose not to closely examine thoroughly his role in these initiatives as they provide little insight into his role

as a thought leader in a large, diverse organization. I focused instead on McKenzie's work with the Society of American Indians, his role as founder of the organization and most prominent white member in the early years of the organization, and his approach toward influencing the Society's platforms and policy-making.

Industrial philanthropy supported and funded countless projects throughout the world during the early decades of the twentieth century, but I investigate the movement only from the perspective of Black liberal arts higher education generally, and Fisk University specifically, from 1900-1925. Further, although several foundations committed money to Fisk during McKenzie's administration, including the Carnegie Foundation, J.C. Penney Foundation, and Rosenwald Fund, I neglect close examination of these foundations in favor of a detailed examination of the impact and influence of the most important of the industrial foundations to Fisk, the General Education Board.

Countless books and articles have been written regarding U.S. culture and society from 1900-1925, as well as Black culture in the South. Because I want to provide a general overview of how the most important cultural, political, and social developments during this period impacted Black liberal arts colleges, and specifically Fisk, I do not investigate thoroughly every development, nor do I address their impact outside Black higher education.

Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) face an uncertain future, largely due to economic challenges and difficulty in raising money. Currently embroiled in a long and bitter legal battle regarding the future of its \$60-70 million dollar collection of art bequeathed to the University by Georgia O'Keeffe, Fisk is saddled with

millions of dollars of debt, and administrators assert that without Fisk's ability to monetize a portion of its collection, the University will close.¹² As HBCU's continue to experience financial challenges and threats to their long term viability, examining HBCU leaders of the past – White and Black – who faced similar difficult circumstances can provide insight relevant to contemporary challenges faced by the institutions. As a leader who worked closely with Native American and African American educational movements, Fayette McKenzie's work at Fisk can offer important insights into the opportunities and pitfalls of soliciting philanthropic funding for Black colleges, and of forging relationships with diverse constituencies whose perspectives may not align with one another.

12 Reginald Stuart, "Donors May Balk at College Giving, If Fisk Prevails With Art Sale," *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 29 September 2010, <http://diverseeducation.com/article/14189/> (accessed 9 January 2011).

CHAPTER TWO

FAYETTE McKENZIE AND HIS WORK WITH INDIANS

The discovery of America was the creation of a race problem.¹
– Fayette McKenzie

In September 1903, Fayette McKenzie, then 32 years old, began a 2,000 mile journey from Philadelphia to a remote Indian reservation in central Wyoming. Travelling across the country by rail, he disembarked at Laramie and transferred to a stage coach, which over the next five days traversed the 165 miles to the reservation. Enduring bitter cold, stage coach breakdowns, and a travelling companion with stage sickness, McKenzie finally reached the reservation, where for the next year he studied, learned, and wrote about Indian life as a basis for his doctoral dissertation. In his position as Principal Teacher on the Wind River Boarding School on the Shoshoni Indian Reservation, McKenzie oversaw instruction of approximately 170 Indian children and taught the most advanced students reading, writing, and arithmetic.² As was often the case at Indian boarding schools, teachers performed several functions outside the classroom, and in addition to his teaching and supervisory responsibilities, McKenzie played the organ and

¹ Fayette Avery McKenzie, *The American Indian in Relation to the White Population of the United States* (Columbus, Ohio: Self-published, 1908), 1.

² Fayette McKenzie to his parents, 19 August 1904, Fayette McKenzie Papers, box 1, folder 1, frame 219, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville. (hereafter cited as McKenzie TSLA Papers).

piano at chapel and church services, led a band, occasionally supervised the dining hall, and fed the school's chickens.³ By all accounts, McKenzie was well liked by both students and faculty, and his short but successful stint at the reservation not only provided important information for his dissertation, but cemented an interest in Indian affairs that continued throughout his lifetime.

Fayette McKenzie was born in 1872 in Montrose, Pennsylvania to a merchant and a homemaker. Although he grew up just fifty miles from the famous Carlisle Indian Industrial School founded in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, it is doubtful McKenzie heard of, or at least paid much attention to, Carlisle as a child.⁴ Upon graduating from Lehigh University in 1895, McKenzie spent the summer studying at the University of Pennsylvania under Franklin Giddings, a prominent sociologist and economist from Bryn Mawr College, and Simon Patten, Professor of Economics at Pennsylvania. McKenzie's work with Giddings and Patten sparked his interest in sociology, with McKenzie calling Patten "the one greatest teacher of [my] experience."⁵ After spending the next two years tutoring children of railroad officials in Pennsylvania, in 1897 Martin Grove (M.G.) Brumbaugh, a long-time McKenzie family friend and President of Juniata College,

3 This information comes from a 14 page handwritten summary of McKenzie's educational and professional career. Written by McKenzie in February 1954 when he was 81 (although the document is undated, McKenzie references the month and year in the text), he refers to himself in the third person throughout. Fayette McKenzie, undated, TSLA McKenzie Papers, box 1, folder 1, frame 41.

4 As the country's first off-reservation boarding school for Indians, the Carlisle "experiment" drew national attention in its efforts to educate and assimilate Indians.

5 Fayette McKenzie, undated, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 1, folder 1, frames 39-53.

offered McKenzie a position at the College teaching French, German, English, History, and Economics.⁶

In 1900, Brumbaugh helped McKenzie secure a scholarship to pursue doctoral work in sociology and economics at the University of Pennsylvania. To help pay his living expenses while in school, McKenzie taught modern languages at the Blight School for Boys in Philadelphia, often teaching five hours prior to going to the University for classes and study in the evening. While at Pennsylvania, McKenzie reconnected with Simon Patten, and “under the special inspiration of Dr. Patten,” McKenzie chose the American Indian as the subject of his doctoral dissertation. Deciding to live among Indians “long enough to get a sense of what the Indians problem in the concrete was,” McKenzie applied to the Indian Service, and soon after accepted a position at the Wind River Indian Boarding School, where his observations helped develop his approach toward addressing the Indian problem.⁷

After completing his assignment on the reservation, McKenzie accepted a position as Assistant Professor of Economics and Sociology at the Ohio State University and continued his work with Indians, often bringing to campus prominent Indians to lecture in his classes. He also volunteered with community and social service organizations in Columbus, including serving as President of the Godman Guild, a settlement house, organizing a school extension society for recreational purposes, and leading a successful effort to consolidate Columbus’s recreation and playground

⁶ Founded in 1879 by members of the Church of Brethren, and at the time one of the few co-educational colleges in the United States, Juniata is located in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, less than 50 miles from the Indian boarding school at Carlisle.

⁷ Ibid., frame 41.

organizations by bringing them under municipal control. McKenzie's achievements in recreation programming burnished his reputation in the field, and he was offered the position of Secretary of the National Playground Association at double his salary at Ohio State. His obligation to care for his ailing parents, with whom he lived, "made it impossible" to accept.⁸

In 1908, McKenzie self-published his dissertation, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population of the United States*, and he soon became a leading White authority on Indian affairs. In 1909, he collaborated with noted anthropologist Roland B. Dixon of Harvard to conduct a study of the Indian population as part of the 1910 census of the U.S. population. In 1914, McKenzie led a study of Indian education from Kansas to Arizona for the U.S. government, and in 1923 he served with other Indian and non-Indian leaders on the Advisory Council on Indian Affairs (often called the Committee of One Hundred), which advised U.S. Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work on Indian-related issues. The work of the Committee served as a catalyst for an ambitious project begun a few years later at Work's request. Frustrated at the failure of U.S. Indian policy, Work commissioned the Institute of Government Research to conduct a study of Indians and U.S. Indian administration. The most comprehensive survey of American Indians ever conducted at the time, and administered under the direction of Lewis Meriam, the report, *The Problem of Indian Administration*, received wide acclaim when it was published in 1928. One of nine staff selected to research and draft the report, McKenzie's official role in the project was Specialist in Existing Material Related to Indians, and he chaired a committee in that area. His influence, however, extended throughout the 872 page

⁸ Ibid., frame 45.

document, as the report noted “the specialist on existing data, the Indian advisor, and the technical director were members of all or practically all committees” and, therefore, helped direct and draft all aspects of the report.⁹

McKenzie’s most prolific intellectual activity on Indian issues spanned from 1904-1914, during which time he published his dissertation and several articles on Indians. In 1912, “The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow” was published in the *Journal of Race Development*, and two years later “The Assimilation of the American Indian” appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. In each piece, McKenzie criticized the government’s Indian policy and advanced recommendations for solving the Indian problem. Hazel Hertzberg, perhaps the only historian to date to publish a scholarly review of McKenzie’s dissertation amounting to more than a few sentences, correctly asserted that “McKenzie sought to put Indian-white relations in a strong theoretical framework drawn from social science and to use social science theory in the formulation of a workable program for Indian affairs.”¹⁰ The same characterization applies to McKenzie’s two journal articles.

9 The study is often referred to as the Meriam Report, for Lewis Meriam, its technical director. The Report’s other committees included: legal aspects, general economic conditions, health, conditions of Indian migrants to urban communities, family life and activities of women, education, and agriculture. The Indian advisor was Henry Roe Cloud (Winnebago), with whom McKenzie had worked in the Society of American Indians. U.S. Institute for Government Research, *The Problem of Indian Administration*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1928), 78-85. It should also be noted that that Institute “made it a rule not to select employees or former employees of the Indian Service” to work on the study. However, they made an exception in McKenzie’s case, concluding that his work on the Shoshoni reservation “was not regarded as a barrier.” 60.

10 Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1971), 32.

According to historian Frederick Hoxie, McKenzie was the only sociologist of his generation whose academic attention focused almost exclusively on the Indian question.¹¹ In studying Indians, McKenzie saw an opportunity to test sociological principles and theories in a real-life laboratory, and the significant influence they could have on humankind excited him. He framed the opportunity in a grandiose academic context, proclaiming that:

...Today the United States stands at the close of the first state of a great sociological endeavor. Perhaps no other nation in the world has ever undertaken so thorough a plan for the salvation of a race through the transfer of culture. No greater glory could come to a nation than to succeed in bringing a primitive people into full participation in the best of its own civilization.¹²

McKenzie's vision for Indian assimilation extended beyond the United States. He considered the broader Indian context to include the 30 million people of indigenous descent living in Latin and South America, and remarked that "if we can bring our own Indians into the national life we shall have learned the method and found the people to bring like progress and welfare to the many millions of the race under other flags, many of whom are in no less need of inspiration and help."¹³

Federal Indian Policy: 1860-1900

When elected United States President in 1868, Ulysses S. Grant continued the long journey toward reuniting the Union and Confederacy in the aftermath of the Civil War. Shortly after he took office, Grant signaled important policy changes toward

11 Hoxie, *The Final Promise*, 133.

12 Fayette Avery McKenzie, "The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow." *The Journal of Race Development*, 3, no.2, (1912): 140.

13 Ibid., 155.

another one-time adversary of the United States government: Native Americans. For nearly 100 years, the U.S. government had fought Indians – on the battlefield, in courtrooms, and over treaty negotiations – in nearly every part of the growing Republic, and with an enormous financial and human cost.¹⁴ U.S. Secretary of the Interior Jacob Dolson Cox commented that it would be “cheaper to feed every adult Indian now living, even to sleepy surfeiting, ...than it would be to carry on a general Indian war for a single year.”¹⁵

Grant’s policy recast the approach toward Indian affairs in two significant ways. First, from an administrative standpoint, he sought to create greater efficiency in the Indian Service by consolidating agencies and eliminating rampant corruption that plagued nearly every level of the organization. Second, Grant realized that assimilating Indians into White society was a far better strategy – for both humane and financial reasons – than making war on them, and he believed that assimilation was possible only by Indians and Whites living in the same communities. To foster such communities, Grant replaced government bureaucrats in the field with Protestant (primarily Quaker) missionaries, whom he believed were trustworthy, better suited to “civilize” Indians, and could manage more effectively the reservations. Working with church organizations, Grant’s administration deployed missionaries to more than seventy reservations, and granted

14 McKenzie asserted by 1866 the U.S. government had spent \$500 million on Indian wars. Fayette Avery McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 19 no.6 (May, 1914), 763.

15 Ibid., 761. Cox served as Interior Secretary in Ulysses S. Grant’s administration from March 1869 – November 1870.

financial support to reservations and Indian missions.¹⁶ The significant changes and more human approach in Indian policy came to be known Grant's Peace Policy.

In the late 1800s the term "civilized" connoted an educated, Christian, and self-reliant individual, and missionaries sent to the reservations attempted to civilize Indians within this context. Despite land often inadequate for raising crops, and resistance from many Indians who had no interest in learning farming, the missionaries encouraged and taught Indians agricultural techniques, introduced them to Christianity through religious instruction and church services, and staffed the reservation schools, teaching young and old Indians English, arithmetic, and other subjects.

Although Indian assimilation made sense to many White Indian advocates, execution of Grant's strategy failed miserably. Government bureaucrats could not decide where to geographically locate Indian reservations to accommodate growing White settlement, corruption remained systemic within the Indian Service, and the missionaries were ill-prepared for the responsibility of managing reservations and civilizing Indian tribes.¹⁷ Ironically, missteps in administration and execution of Grant's policy contributed to further bloody conflicts with Indians, including the Sioux War and Nez Perce War, and led to an abandonment of the policy by the late 1870s. The circumstances for Indians, however, changed little. They remained on reservations, and frequent dislocations to accommodate White settlement persisted. They also continued to

16 Robert H. Keller, Jr. *American Protestantism and United States Indian Policy, 1869-82* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 15.

17 Hoxie, *The Final Promise*, 3.

receive rations of food and money.¹⁸ McKenzie bemoaned these handouts, and proclaimed that instead of stimulating assimilation, Grant's approach "all too frequently became a policy of pauperization. Assimilation has been replaced or supplemented by slow extermination. Peace became an object in itself rather than the instrument of progress."¹⁹

With Indian policy and the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs in disarray, in 1887 Congress passed the General Allotment Act, the most significant piece of legislation regulating Indian affairs since the Indian Appropriations Act of 1851, which created the reservation system. Often referred to as the Dawes Act for Senator Henry L. Dawes of Massachusetts, the landmark legislation provided the theoretical foundation for federal Indian policy for the next fifty years. The Act's most important feature authorized the breakup of Indian reservations into individual parcels, or allotments, which were then distributed to members of each tribe. Title to the parcels was held in trust by the U.S. government for twenty-five years, at which time the title transferred to the allottee, who could do with the land as he wished. Upon receiving an allotment of land – and despite not having legal title – an Indian became a United States citizen. The government hoped that distributing land to Indians would promote sustainability and economic progress on the reservations, and facilitate Indian assimilation.²⁰ Although championed as Indian-

18 Indians were not U.S. citizens, but considered wards of the U.S. government. As wards, they received financial assistance and food rations.

19 McKenzie, "The Assimilation of the American Indian," 764.

20 S. Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy*. U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 95-96.

friendly legislation, many Indians – as well as sympathetic Whites – opposed the Dawes Act, believing it a strategy to separate Indians with their tribal lands.

Although Indian assimilation was a primary goal of both Grant’s policy and the Dawes Act, the concept of assimilation still faced many detractors. U.S. Congressman John Hancock asserted that “the theory of educating the wild child of the forest, inculcating in his mind high moral and religious sentiments in advance of learning him to work, has proved to be an absolute failure. No inferior race in all historic times has escaped one of these three results: subjugation, amalgamation, or extermination.” The government’s extermination effort through the Indian wars of the early-mid 1800s had failed, and the White establishment certainly did not favor amalgamation. Therefore, Hancock concluded that “the only remaining position then to be assigned to the Indian is that of subjugation. He must be subjugated...as will place him under control of the government.”²¹ In practical terms, subjugation meant moving Indians to large reservations far away from White settlement, where they would live as wards of the United States government.

McKenzie’s Critique of U.S. Indian Policy

McKenzie’s scholarship on Indians between 1908-1914 combined scathing critique of federal Indian policy with a variety of solutions intended to redirect the government’s misguided efforts. In both scholarly journals and Indian-specific publications, including the quarterly magazine of the Society of American Indians, McKenzie’s work reached an audience consisting of academics, government officials, influential Whites interested in Indian affairs, and Indians themselves. This exposure,

²¹ Cited in McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 15-16.

combined with his work with the Society of American Indians, provided McKenzie a prominent platform to articulate shortcomings of federal policy and promote his progressive vision for Indian affairs.

According to McKenzie, scholarly thought on the Indian problem consisted of three different perspectives, which he characterized as the “conqueror, the historian, and the statesmen; or those of the biologist, the ethnologist, and the sociologist.” With a philosophy that is “the conscious or unconscious comfort of a nation which dispossesses an ancient people and enters into the inheritance of continental wealth,” the conqueror is: an old-school Darwinian who believes that this world belongs to the strong and that the melting of the primitive races before the arms and business spirit of the ‘civilized peoples’ is a heaven-decreed justification of the whole process of spoliation, exploitation and conquest.” The conqueror asserted Indians were inferior to Whites, embodied “laziness, improvidence, vice...and savagery,” and that “the fate of the dispossessed is pathetic but inevitable and necessary, if not directly deserved.” McKenzie believed the conqueror perspective deprived Indians of ambition, frustrated progressive policy-making, and was therefore “folly to waste our energies upon a vain idea.” Yet, McKenzie wondered if the government believed in the biological perspective, asking if its \$14 million annual expenditure on Indian affairs was “squandered merely to salve the conscience of a humane nation.”²²

The historical ethnological view ignored the question of Indian superiority or inferiority, asserted simply that the Indian was different, and suggested that civilizations must develop on their own and cannot be influenced by external factors. In this context,

²² McKenzie, “The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 135-138.

Indians represented significant value for science, and their civilization should be preserved uncontaminated so scientists may study and observe “secrets of social forces and social development.” The historian believed that in attempting to civilize Indians there would be lost “a world of truth,” and very little gained. Further, since progress must come from internal forces, outside influence would simply serve as a superfluous “costume which, however valuable and handsome in itself, cannot be retained because it is not the right shape and size.” McKenzie dismissed this “let-alone” policy partly because of the “impossibility of the scheme. The white man would not stay out and the Indian would not stay in the region assigned to him.” Moreover, McKenzie could not reconcile the progressive nature of man with a stagnant culture. “The group that would live must adapt itself to the larger culture that surrounds it. The longer the attempt is postponed the wider the gap that must be bridged.”²³

McKenzie’s preferred theoretical model for Indian affairs provided a context in which “optimistic statesmanship” can “build a positive and progressive program” of Indian advancement through assimilation:

The problem leads to the question: Is culture a product of biology and blood, or one of psychology and tradition? The pessimist and the indifferentist work from the former premise, the optimist the latter. If the mind, individual or social, is built up out of the environment and experience, we have great possibilities of racial mutation. We have only to effect a considerable change in circumstances (material and psychic) to bring out a corresponding change in ideas and culture.²⁴

“The Indian is largely the creation of his environment,” McKenzie argued, “and therefore cannot be maintained much above the standard fixed by the environment

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

provided for him.”²⁵ In exposing Indians to White culture, McKenzie believed the race would rapidly progress to more advanced cultural understanding and accelerate its assimilation. He likened the process to that of himself travelling in France, struggling with an unfamiliar environment, language, and custom:

It is common as you know to say that while Indians are bright and interesting, you must treat them like children. The basis for this opinion doubtless lies in the narrower range of education and experience that the Indian has had. People in Paris today doubtless think I am worse than a child. My experience has not fitted me for their language or their ways, but hope in time to adjust myself through a sort of education, so that they will find me not quite so dumb after all. I presume I know more French than thousands of natives of Paris, but I do not have command of the small group of words which they use so fluently. In the end my privilege of wider education will give me a greater power in French and possibly in France than thousands of individual Parisians who now regard me as childish. So with the Indian, he must have not only depth but range of education and experience, *fi* (sic) is to fit into whatever situation he may find himself in.²⁶

McKenzie’s environmentalist approach reflected the influence of George Bird Grinnell. Grinnell received his Ph.D. from Yale in 1890, and instead of plying a traditional academic career, he deepened his involvement in land conservation efforts and study of Indians. In 1900, he published *Indian to-Day*, a treatise that McKenzie called “one of the sanest and most interesting books to be found in Indian literature,” and “the only book ever written discussing fully and rationally the status and condition of the

25 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 87.

26 McKenzie to Charles Dagenett, 3 July 1914, roll 5, frame 45. Papers of the Society of American Indians, ed. John W. Larner Jr. Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1987 (hereafter referred to as SAI Papers). McKenzie spent several months in France in 1914 and recounted some of his travels to Dagenett. Dagenett was one of the founders of the Society of American Indians and served in several leadership positions, including Secretary/Treasurer and Second Vice President.

modern Indian...” So impressed was he with Grinnell’s thinking, McKenzie devoted nearly five pages in his dissertation to discussing and applauding his work.²⁷

Grinnell asserted that the Indian “mind does not work like the mind of the adult white man.” The difference was not a reflection of intellect, but rather of environment. Grinnell suggested that if a “young Indian is separated from his tribe and is brought up in association with white people, and so has an opportunity to have his mind trained to civilized modes of thinking and to imbibe civilized ideas, he is found to be not less intelligent than the average white.” According to Grinnell, “the difference in mind means merely that the Indian, like every other human being, receives his knowledge or his mental training from his surroundings.”²⁸

Grinnell’s basic premise that one’s environment – not biological traits – determined characteristics and intelligence refuted the popular view of Indians’ biological inferiority. During the last half of the nineteenth century a national debate raged regarding undesirable racial characteristics of non-white peoples, including intelligence, capability, and other traits perceived as inferior to Whites. Contemporarily referred to as scientific racism, its proponents often used biological data and mechanisms to support claims of inferiority. Advanced in part to justify slavery in the United States, the arguments invariably extended to Indians, with academics and government officials

27 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 41.

28 George Bird Grinnell, *The Indians of Today*, (New York: Duffield & Company, 1911) 22. The 1911 publication is the second printing of Grinnell’s 1900 work, *Indians To-Day*, which McKenzie cited in his dissertation.

claiming that minorities' limited intellectual capacity and often savage traits should preclude their citizenship and legal rights.²⁹

McKenzie refuted claims of Indian biological inferiority, citing as one of the most dangerous enemies of the race "those who believe that Indians are inferior and unworthy of the best," and suggesting "the greatest injustice we [Whites] do them is to consider them inferior and incapable."³⁰ Influenced by Grinnell, McKenzie argued the primary reason for Indians' perceived primitive ways of life grew out of tradition, not biological differences. He asserted when given the same access to opportunities as whites, Indians "are capable of acquiring a high degree of skill and culture, and of sustaining the highest type of character," and possess "as varied...tastes and aptitudes as the white man."³¹

That civilizing influences came from the external environment, not through biological factors, provided McKenzie with a theoretical justification for granting Indians equal political and legal rights under United States law, a radical concept in the early 1900s. Many Whites still viewed Indians as savages and incapable of any civilizing influence, but McKenzie blamed ineffective government programs and White indifference for Indians' lack of advancement and motivation. He suggested that a philosophy of pessimism on the part of Whites "works to rob the Indian of ambition."³² As a result, "the greatest barrier to their restoration to normality and efficiency lies in

²⁹ Hoxie, *The Final Promise*, 126-129.

³⁰ McKenzie, "The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow," 153.

³¹ McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 87.

³² McKenzie, "The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow," 137.

their passivity and discouragement. We have broken the spring of hope and ambition. Can it ever be repaired?" McKenzie believed it could be repaired, but doing so required "giving the Indian identical or equal opportunity with ourselves to share in and to control the social consciousness, as well as to share in the privileges, immunities, duties, and obligations of the members of our national social body."³³ Asserting that "No community can be half free and half bound," McKenzie declared, "Make the Indian the equal of his neighbor in all his possibilities and he will have a motive to control his passions, and to strive to realize those possibilities. In this matter the two races must go up or down together."³⁴ Until Indians enjoyed equal rights, their freedom to participate fully in society remained compromised. Referring again to the importance of environmental factors in Indian advancement, McKenzie asserted that, "Enough has been done...to convince the world that the Indian can compete on even terms in many industries with white men, and that he will do so in all lines when equal training is secured for him."³⁵

McKenzie asserted it was America's duty and obligation to successfully assimilate Indians, and deemed it morally necessary that the United States help its "Indian brothers." From the time Europeans first stepped foot in the New World, White settlement and encroachment upon Indian lands continued largely unabated until the late 1800s. When White settlers encountered a people less numerous, less organized, and, in their minds, far less civilized than themselves, they quickly displaced them to

33 McKenzie, "The Assimilation of the American Indian," 770.

34 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 34.

35 McKenzie, "The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow," 152.

accommodate expansion of a growing country and a civilized way of life. McKenzie seized on the historical imbalance and invoked in his argument for Indian uplift a sense of White guilt:

Why should a nation of nearly 100,000,000 people trouble itself about 250,000 people scattered all over its wide and domain and hidden in its deserts and mountains? The answer is plain. We owe something to the people whom we have supplanted. We owe the best of guardianship to our national wards. We owe that which the strong always owe to the weak. In themselves these people are worthy of adequate care.³⁶

Forced relocation to reservations and ineffective government administration of Indian affairs for over half a century only made the argument more compelling and urgent. "...We have forced upon the Indians the status of wards, and therefore cannot divest ourselves of the responsibilities which devolve upon trustees and guardians," McKenzie proclaimed.³⁷ Responsibility for Indian welfare and advancement – indeed, existence of the race – rested with the government, and McKenzie framed the issue in stark terms, stating "we are engaged in a contest wherein the verdict must be success or failure. It is a life and death struggle."³⁸

Apart from the biological and moral arguments for Indian rights, McKenzie also suggested sociological reasons for Indian assistance. In an article targeted to academicians, McKenzie wrote of the "obligation of the nation to the Indian" and called upon the Academy, and sociologists in particular, "to furnish the scientific basis for the Indian policies of the nation." Noting the process of assimilating the Indian was a

³⁶ Ibid., 154-155.

³⁷ McKenzie, "The Assimilation of the American Indian," 761.

³⁸ McKenzie, "The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow," 141.

sociological problem, he chided sociologists for the little interest they took in it.

Sensing an Academy unsympathetic to the tribulations of Indians, McKenzie framed the issue in scholarly terms, suggesting that “one of the great reasons for direct service on our part in the social movements of the world is that we may rectify, if not actually create, the splendid body of theory which we are to transmit to our students. It is very questionable whether theory uncontaminated by endeavor remains good theory.”³⁹

An ardent proponent of assimilation, McKenzie believed it the surest route to Indian advancement and the only viable strategy to avoid extinction of the race. “It is certain that the Indian can not survive except he come completely into the life of the nation,” McKenzie stated frankly.⁴⁰ McKenzie defined assimilation as inclusion in the political, legal, and intellectual framework of society. “The assimilation of one race into another and surrounding race means bringing them into a full share in the life and thought of the latter,” McKenzie asserted. “They must become constituent parts of the Nation. They must be units of the new society.”⁴¹

Indian assimilation required removal of barriers impeding Indian progress, and McKenzie pointed to several obstacles that retarded Indian development. First, he deplored Indian contact with the “wrong kinds of whites,” (including “Congressman and merchants”), whose interest in Indians came secondary to financial priorities, created elements of mistrust toward all White people, and stifled Indians’ opportunities to economically advance. Second, the “tyranny of the tribe” discouraged Indians from

39 McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 762.

40 McKenzie, “The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 140.

41 McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 768.

relinquishing tribal customs and traditions that assimilationists viewed as impediments toward advancement. Finally, McKenzie believed the most important factors preventing Indian advancement were “conditions made or allowed by the government.”⁴²

Treaties with Indians formed the basis of Indian policy in the United States from the country’s founding through 1850, at which time expanding White settlement and growing armed conflict with Indians required a different and more coordinated strategy. In 1851, Congress passed the Indian Appropriations Act, which forcibly relocated Indians to federally managed reservations far from white settlement. Further White encroachment into Indian territories and escalating violence led to strategies that promoted greater cooperation with Indians, including Grant’s Peace Policy in the 1860s, and the Dawes Act in the 1880s. These strategies, however, framed cooperation on White terms, and largely ignored more difficult philosophical questions of equal rights for Indians, White culpability for the disastrous state of Indian affairs, and White responsibility in promoting Indian advancement.

McKenzie characterized inaction by the government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs just as pernicious and misguided as prevailing Indian policy, pointing to many Indians’ lack of desire to pursue more civilized lives as an unfortunate outcome of federal inefficiency. Indians possessed intelligence and capability, but ineffective and demoralizing government policies provided them little hope and incentive to become more civilized. “The real evil of the situation lies, not so much in the acts of the ruler, as in the inaction which the situation forces upon the subject,” McKenzie proclaimed. Inaction meant stagnation without progress, which led to growing government

⁴² McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 116.

expenditures to care for Indians, and created among them overreliance on government subsidies and handouts. McKenzie recognized in the failed policies of the past an opportunity for Indian advancement had been lost, that “the spring of life has been broken, and a special effort will be necessary if he is to rise to the new situation.”⁴³ “Rapid progress for the Indian is still possible,” McKenzie argued, “it depends merely upon a better policy and its thorough and consistent application.”⁴⁴

The government played the dominant role in the creation of the Indian problem, and McKenzie called on it to lead efforts to provide an environment that promoted Indian advancement:

Solution of the Indian Problem, so far as the national government is concerned, lies in the abolition of the reservation, the complete and final allotment of lands, the genuine and early allotment of trust funds, the granting of full citizenship, the withdrawal of special privileges, the enforcement of the Indian’s equal rights in the courts of the land, the cessation of the practice of giving rations, the control of the criminal white, whether saloonkeeper or land shark, the improvement of the school system, the raising the standing of the teachers, the extension of the outing system, and providing of the industrial opportunities, particularly on the reservations, the complete severance of financial relations with sectarian institutions.⁴⁵

Although many Whites believed Indians did not possess sufficient mental capability to assume the responsibilities of citizenship and legal rights, McKenzie argued that Indians could not make significant achievement toward assimilation with such issues in perpetual limbo. Although supportive of land allotment granted by the Dawes Act,

⁴³ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 116.

McKenzie believed the legislation did not sufficiently address more fundamental needs

like political and legal enfranchisement. He argued:

the aim of the government, in its political action, should be to remove as rapidly as possible – and that means very rapidly – all differences between the red and the white man in their civil status – to make the red man realize that he has no privileges of any sort not granted to people of other colors, and that he has all the obligations which rest upon his fellow citizens of all colors.⁴⁶

By reimagining Indian policy, the government could create hope and incentives for Indians to advance economically and socially.

Despite government policies ostensibly aimed at promoting assimilation, McKenzie argued existing efforts proved ineffective.

The Indians are not assimilated. I maintain that the Indian has not been incorporated into our national life, and cannot be until we radically change a number of fundamental things – defined status, early citizenship and control over property, adequate education, efficient government and schools, broad and deep religious training, and genuine social recognition. We must give him full rights in our society and demand from him complete responsibility.⁴⁷

Indian advancement required a clear path for Indian citizenship, recognition of legal rights, and assimilation in White communities throughout the United States, with the two former objectives serving as important prerequisites for successful attainment of the latter. McKenzie asserted Americans' strength "lies in the energy, initiative, and self-determination which his political and economic freedom forces upon him." Because of government intransigence and ineptitude, "the Indian today knows no such freedom."⁴⁸ More than that, McKenzie viewed enfranchisement not solely an Indian problem, but one

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ McKenzie, "The Assimilation of the American Indian," 769.

⁴⁸ McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 30.

that impacted other groups in America. “More and more the condition of the Indian must approximate that of the white population,” he declared, and “more and more measures and means must assume forms applicable to people of all colors.”⁴⁹

Indian assimilationists viewed European immigration to the United States as a template in their efforts toward Indian assimilation. According to Hazel Hertzberg, “educated Indians saw the immigrant experience as a model for the Indians in the manner in which the immigrant became Americanized through public education and the easy acquisition of citizenship.”⁵⁰ However, the process of assimilation for Indians – at least conceived by McKenzie and other assimilationists – differed significantly from the European experience. In many cases, immigrants from Europe possessed similar appearances to Americans in terms of skin complexion, facial features, and dress. They often settled together in the same urban neighborhoods and brought with them many of the traditions and customs they enjoyed in their homeland. They continued to speak the same language and often worship in the same way, and created in America a culture that mixed old customs with influences from their new environment. The assimilationist doctrine for Indians, however, generally required a complete severing of cultural customs including language, dress, religion, and manners. Indians might live together in communities, but assimilationists sought to eliminate all vestiges of traditional Indian life. While many Indian leaders in the Society for American Indians favored the “all or nothing” approach, many Indians refused to embrace such a drastic approach.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁰ Hertzberg, *The Search for an American Indian Identity*, 23.

McKenzie's Solution: The Vanishing Policy

The notion of subjugating Indians and relocating them to places where they would have little contact with whites – the solution Congressman Hancock advocated in the 1870s – became increasingly obsolete in the late 1800s. Although federal Indian policy coincidentally advanced some of Hancock's vision by continuing the system of remote Indian reservations, encroachment by Whites into Indian territories rendered impractical ideas of racial separation. By 1900, most Indian observers agreed that sound policy required attention to Indian assimilation *at some level*.

McKenzie believed the solution to the Indian problem lay in a set of interrelated initiatives within a comprehensive framework known as the “vanishing policy,” a phrase “intended to mean that discriminations and privileges peculiar to the Indian should as rapidly as possible be done away, and [Indians] at the same rate be admitted to full citizenship and equal opportunity to share in the economic, legal, and political life of the country.”⁵¹ He developed a plan for Indian enfranchisement that called on the federal government to address three basic elements: ensure political and legal rights for Indians (defined as citizenship and recognition of legal status); end the reservation system, which would force Indians to engage with Whites and accelerate their inclusion into White society; and create a comprehensive system of Indian education, including higher education, that, among other things, would help develop an Indian leadership class. McKenzie also called on Indians to embrace assimilation and to take advantage of government programs designed to accelerate their advancement.

⁵¹ McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 765.

McKenzie viewed assimilation not in shades of gray, but rather from an all or nothing perspective. “History, experience and theory seem to prove that the primitive man can not live by the side of the modern man,” he argued. “If the Indian is to survive, he must become modern.”⁵² Becoming modern required that “the strength of tribal control must be broken. The reservation must go. Gratuities must cease. Distinctions of race must disappear. Closeness of contact with the real elements of civilization must be made wider and more vital.”⁵³ Indian survival and assimilation required elimination – or “vanishing” – of the reservation system and tribal control.

McKenzie characterized tribal control as a “social tyranny of the tribe,” which although honoring tradition, obedience, and custom, produced “not only a static society, but static individuals.” The tribe transcended the individual, scorned “personal desire or individual attainments,” and valued communal property. As such, McKenzie viewed the tribal relationship as a dangerous adversary of Indian progress, and he advocated eliminating tribal bonds. “For the Indian we desire change and progress, something which is directly opposed to the forces of his tradition and custom,” he argued. “Any considerable change in a short time means the absolute rending of those forces.” Assimilation required Indians to accept a harsh reality of becoming Americanized: that “the tribal organization and the tribal spirit are not compatible with the white man’s life and civilization.”⁵⁴

⁵² McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 111.

⁵³ Ibid., 94.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 21-22.

A proponent for dismantling the reservation system, McKenzie understood that doing so would not end Indian life on the reservations. Aging members of the Indian community, as well as younger members who returned after pursuing their education elsewhere, ensured continuation of Indian communities. Instead of abandoning them, McKenzie advocated bringing civilization to former reservations in the form of an “Indian settlement” system that “would have its religious work, its social work, its medical work, its educational work,” with all “center[ed] around its industrial work. The latter should ensure diversification of industries which every progressive community must have.” He envisioned settlements as economic centers in which Indians could work and prosper, but also refuges for Indians who met misfortune elsewhere. “There are bound to be many who will have insufficient lands for a complete competence, or who will lose their lands through fraud or folly.” McKenzie declared. “To these the settlement would offer a new chance for an honest and independent livelihood.” Moreover, they would provide an alternative to a life of agriculture, and “provide another chance for the man whose capabilities or follies divorce him from the land.”⁵⁵

Believing missionary societies and churches could begin the settlements, McKenzie suggested that “one of the most useful things the government could do, would be to turn over to missionary or settlement control natural resources,” for a limited number of years to help build up industries and economic sustainability on the settlements. Once started, McKenzie predicted the settlements “would be in part self-supporting and self-perpetuating.” He called upon colleges and universities to send student volunteers to serve one year on the settlements, suggesting “they could do much

⁵⁵ Ibid., 107.

to solve the Indian problem.” Finally, McKenzie suggested private philanthropy – through individuals, religious bodies, and foundations – could help establish and grow settlements.⁵⁶

Indian Self-Responsibility

If George Bird Grinnell’s influence on McKenzie focused on theoretical constructs of cultural transmission and assimilation, Richard Henry Pratt’s influence manifested itself in pragmatic approaches to executing and realizing Grinnellian theory. A military man and veteran of the Civil War, Pratt served in the Indian Wars of the 1870s, and in 1875 took command of several allegedly hostile Indian prisoners, whom he transported from Oklahoma to Fort Marion in St. Augustine, Florida. While at Ft. Marion, Pratt experimented with how to civilize and “Americanize” his Indian captives. Pratt schooled them in English and other subjects, helped them find markets for their Indian crafts and artwork, and found them jobs in local agricultural enterprises. His success earned him an appointment to Hampton Normal and Industrial Institute, a school for blacks led by General Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Shortly thereafter, the Bureau of Indian Affairs allowed Pratt to recruit young Indians from the West and bring them to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he established an industrial school for Indians.⁵⁷

Pratt’s educational model at Carlisle required eliminating all vestiges of Indian influence among his students, including aspects of their physical appearance. Indian

⁵⁶ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁷ Richard Henry Pratt. *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904*. Robert Utley, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964). Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, and Lorene Sisquoc. “Origins and Development of the American Indian Boarding School System.” In *Boarding School Blues: Revisiting American Indian Educational Experiences*, ed. Clifford E. Trafzer, Jean A. Keller, Lorene Sisquoc. (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 13-14.

dress and long hair were forbidden, and replaced with short hair and white dress.

English was spoken at all times and Indian dialects prohibited. “Kill the Indian in him, and save the man,” Pratt was fond of saying. He believed that all people, including Indians, were “born a blank,” and if reared and educated in a civilized setting, Indians would possess “a civilized language, life and purpose.” As staunch a believer in Indian capability as he was a critic of federal Indian policy, Pratt asserted that:

When we cease to teach the Indian that he is less than a man; when we recognize fully that he is capable in all respects as we are, and that he only needs the opportunities and privileges which we possess to enable him to assert his humanity and manhood; when we act consistently towards him in accordance with that recognition; when we cease to fetter him to conditions which keep him in bondage, surrounded by retrogressive influences; when we allow him the freedom of association and the developing influences of social contact – then the Indian will quickly demonstrate that he can be truly civilized, and he himself will solve the question of what to do with the Indian.⁵⁸

Pratt’s belief in Indian self-responsibility, and that the Indian was the equal to White man in all things save for experience, resonated with McKenzie, and helped shape his ideas for Indian policy and assimilation. McKenzie considered Carlisle the “most efficient government Indian school of our history,” and Pratt “probably the most original and most valuable thinker on Indian matters” in the United States.⁵⁹

Although harshly critical of conventional White thought about Indian capability, McKenzie understood advancement required Indian self-determination. “Long ago I become convinced that the Indian problem could not be solved without the initiative and

58 Capt. Richard H. Pratt, *Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (1892), 46-59. Reprinted in “The Advantages of Mingling Indians with Whites,” *Americanizing the American Indians: Writings by the “Friends of the Indian” 1880-1900*, ed. Francis P. Prucha, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 260-271.

59 Fayette McKenzie, undated, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 1, folder 1. McKenzie first met Pratt when he conducted a study of Indian education from Kansas to Arizona in 1913.

co-operation of the Indian himself,” he declared. “When the government has done all that it can, there still remains the stimulation and development of internal forces to be effected.”⁶⁰ Indeed, “the race itself must respond to the opportunity. It must develop into harmony with the new order. Character, attainment, achievement are the final tests of a race.”⁶¹ McKenzie recognized the difficulty in severing ties with old customs and traditions, but called upon Indians to make the leap from a lesser civilization to a higher culture. The government could provide an environment conducive for uplift, but it was the Indian’s responsibility to seize the opportunity for a new and better life and take control of their future.

McKenzie harshly criticized federal policy granting Indians living on reservations rations of food, money, and clothing, and believed the handouts lessened Indian motivation for exertion and self-dependence. He viewed Indian self-responsibility as a series of actions necessary for Indians to move along the spectrum of civilization and advancement, which included leaving the reservation, learning English, pursuing education, and adopting the religion and customs of white society. McKenzie believed the process *of* assimilation was an important requisite *to* assimilation, suggesting that “it will be well, of course, to secure the rights of the Indian, by any means which will not deprive him of the testing experiences of self-responsibility.”⁶² Therefore, “the hope, the only hope, for the Indian is for him to jump into civilization. The Indian will survive only by doing, and although some will fail, experience is a strong teacher and will

60 McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 770.

61 McKenzie, “The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 147.

62 McKenzie, *The American Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 46.

ultimately mean salvation of the race.” He likened the process to that of a swimmer, asserting that “the only way to learn to swim is swim.”⁶³

McKenzie’s concept of assimilation and Indian self-responsibility demanded that Indians compete in the same professional and academic endeavors, and be held to the same high standards, as Whites. From an Indian perspective, competing on equal terms with Whites helped foster white respect and appreciation for Indian capability. Eager to demonstrate Indians were on par with Whites if given the chance, McKenzie directed his efforts more on regulating and expanding avenues for Indian uplift than addressing issues of Indian retrenchment and fallibility. He viewed as unfortunate Indians discouraged or disenfranchised by assimilation efforts, but he believed their individual experiences served as powerful lessons to both themselves and other Indians. Arguing that Indians should be allowed to sell lands granted them as part of the Dawes Act, McKenzie posited doing so would give them “at least a slight chance of rising to a better level through the exertion necessary through self-preservation.” McKenzie also recognized that some Indians would sell their lands and “sink to the bottom,” but that they would serve as a stark example to other Indians of the importance of industriousness. McKenzie admitted the harsh nature of his suggestion:

This is a hard doctrine. That its application will give good results remains for the future to demonstrate. The first exposure to temptation and the consequent downfall do not prove that the lower condition will be a permanent one. Experience will result in reformation for some of the individual Indians, and, in time, for the tribe as a whole. The depth of degradation of the parents will strike a stronger contrast before the minds

⁶³ Ibid., 33.

of the children. The pains of poverty will fill the Indian schools, and enforce the lessons of industry and morality taught therein.⁶⁴

McKenzie understood that executing a coherent strategy of assimilation necessarily meant marginalizing some Indians in the short term, but he viewed such failures as powerful lessons that would benefit Indians in the long term. In short, the march toward assimilation and advancement of an entire race justified individual costs.

Indian Legal and Political Rights

On October 13, 1913 Fayette McKenzie addressed the Third Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians in Madison, Wisconsin. In a large hall on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, McKenzie called upon Indians and Whites to forgive each other for past transgressions and work as one for a better future. The themes of the speech addressed his broad strategies for Indian uplift: racial cooperation, government responsibility for Indian improvement, Indian self-responsibility, and legal and political rights for Indians. "There can be no justice between those who think they are essentially unlike," McKenzie proclaimed. "Justice is the relation which exists between equals. Justice will prevail between the Indian and the white when each knows that he is the brother of the other, - the son of the same Great Father, - each sharer in the privileges and in the duties of divine humanity. Justice will prevail when each race looks upon the other as it looks upon itself."⁶⁵

Indian participation in the country's economic, political, and intellectual life required government recognition of their legal rights, and McKenzie asserted the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁵ Fayette McKenzie, "The Cooperation of the Two Races," *The Journal of the Society of American Indians*, 2, 23-24.

government “from the beginning has essayed to prevent any clear definition of the legal status of the Indian.” He blamed the lack of clear direction as “one of the fundamental reasons for the great confusion in Indian affairs, and for the relative failure in the solution of the Indian problem.”⁶⁶ McKenzie agreed in principle with the Dawes Act, believing private land ownership among Indians would effectively dismantle the tribal/reservation system he perceived as a major impediment to Indian advancement. He harshly criticized implementation of the legislation, however, as the Act attempted to clarify questions regarding citizenship and legal status, and the interdependence of the two often created ambiguity. Indians granted land under the Act did not pay taxes on the property, and “local governments oftentimes declare it an injustice to accord privileges without requiring duties, and actually do refuse the stipulated favors of the law.” As a result, whites rarely cared about – and Indians rarely understood – the distinction between Indian citizens and Indians considered wards of the government. Most reservation Indians were assumed to be non-citizens and part of a tribe, leading McKenzie to assert that “the mass of red blood still remains segregated in the body politic. And the evil is no less than before – perhaps worse, because unrecognized.”⁶⁷

Inconsistencies between the rhetoric and implementation of Indian policy left Indians – and McKenzie – frustrated and confused. Although the Dawes Act promoted Indian assimilation, it instead continued an ethic of dependency that counteracted Indian advancement. McKenzie observed that the Indian “has been trained...to expect to have his food, his clothing, and his whole economic and political life provided and arranged

66 Fayette McKenzie, “The Indian and His Problem,” *Dial* 49 (July-Dec.1910): 230.

67 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 28.

for him,” powerful incentives for Indians to remain attached to the reservation. He

harshly criticized the Act’s incoherent approach to advancement:

But at the same moment that we tell the Indian that his fate lies in his own hands, we also tell him three other things, namely, that he cannot sell his own lands or use his own money held by the government, that he cannot sue or be sued in the courts, and that he is not subject to taxation as all other able-bodied men are. We do not here mention the further facts that the government will relieve him from the support and education of all his children, present and prospective, from the age of six to manhood and womanhood. What race under heaven could develop under such monstrous conditions? Make him a citizen in fact as well as in name! Give him control of his property and self.⁶⁸

In 1906, Congress passed an important amendment to the allotment law in the Dawes Act that gave the U.S. Secretary of the Interior the ability to grant fee-simple titles to any allottee “competent and capable of managing his or her affairs.”⁶⁹ Termed the Burke Act for Congressman Charles H. Burke, and championed by Francis Leupp, then Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the legislation stipulated that every Indian who received a fee-simple title automatically became a citizen of the United States. However, the amendment also adjusted the original terms of the allotment policy and delayed citizenship for Indians holding allotments until the end of the twenty-five year trust period, citing as the primary reason Indians’ unpreparedness for citizenship. In granting immediate citizenship for “competent and capable” Indians, the Burke Act created an opportunity for recognition and advancement for a small portion of the Indian population, but it also extended the period to citizenship – and thus delayed opportunities – for many others.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁹ Fee simple title meant that “all restrictions as to sale, incumbrance, or taxation of said land [would] be removed.” Hoxie, *The Final Promise*, 165.

Although implemented to help accelerate Indian assimilation and citizenship, the Burke Act, like much of federal Indian policy at the time, was poorly designed and executed. McKenzie harshly criticized the legislation for its lack of breadth, as the fee-simple clause contained unnecessary restrictions, and the extension of the trust period “postpones citizenship for another generation.” Further, because of the power accorded to the Secretary of the Interior to grant, in effect, immediate citizenship to allottees, McKenzie correctly foresaw an Indian population with a confusing array of legal and citizenship classifications. “We shall have former allottees citizens, and future allottees non-citizens...in some cases on the same reservation. We shall have non-allotted Indian citizens and taxpayers in the southwest, while allotted Indians in the northwest are neither citizens or taxpayers.”⁷⁰ Finally, the subjective nature of the criteria required to obtain a fee simple title – “competent and capable” – naturally led to confusion among Indians and rampant abuse by Whites, who preyed upon Indians incorrectly deemed able to manage their legal affairs in a white, English-speaking culture. Instead of granting citizenship to a favored few, McKenzie argued for citizenship for all Indians.

Achieving Indian political and legal enfranchisement – core components of the McKenzian notion of assimilation – required convincing Whites that Indians were worthy of such privileges and responsibilities. Although Americans’ views of Indians slowly moved from animosity to pity and curiosity in the early 1900s, most considered Indians a primitive – even savage – people intellectually, religiously, culturally, and socially. The government’s unwillingness to grant citizenship to Indians en masse reflected prevailing views among many politicians and the American public that Indians were not worthy of

⁷⁰ McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 33.

citizenship and should therefore not be entrusted with the responsibilities accorded citizens. A letter from Arthur Parker (Seneca), a prominent assimilationist, Indian rights advocate, and founding member of the Society of American Indians, characterized the anti-Indian tenor among politicians when he noted, “one senator wrote me that there was a great deal of prejudice in considering Indian matters and reluctance to take them on.”⁷¹

In arguing for Indian citizenship, McKenzie framed the issue in a context palatable to the White political and cultural establishments, arguing that citizenship for the Indian “means chiefly self-responsibility, and opens the ‘door of hope’ to those capable of rising to responsibility.”⁷² He also positioned the effort in a distinct Christian context, asserting that Indian conversion to Christianity would help instill in them principles important to White society, including strong morals and values, honesty, thrift, and an aversion to liquor and drugs – in short, attributes that facilitated Indians’ assimilation into white America.

McKenzie understood that White resistance to Indian citizenship included fear over loss of political power and control. He dismissed these concerns, however, suggesting “there are several conditions which minimize the possible evils on civic freedom” if Indians were granted citizenship. First, although citizen Indians would be allowed to vote, “his ignorance of our language and methods will bar to a great extent any otherwise undue tendency to misuse his new privileges.” Second, with some exceptions, “Indians are relatively too few to have any considerable power for harm over the destinies of the dominant race.” And in those areas where the Indian population is

71 Letter from Arthur C. Parker to William J. Kershaw, 12 November 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 530.

72 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 35.

greater, “if there may be any considerable danger in giving the franchise to the illiterate Indian, every state is still free to exercise its duty to enact an educational qualification for the franchise.”⁷³

Indian Education

McKenzie believed Indian access to high quality education was as important to Indian advancement as legal and political rights, and a foundation for long term Indian progress. “Education today remains the keynote of any scientific policy,” McKenzie declared. “The salvation of the race and the efficiency of any Indian policy are equally dependent upon it.”⁷⁴ McKenzie argued that Indian educational opportunities should approximate those of the white population, asserting that Indians deserve “as careful, as varied, and as complete training as is given to the white race,” and such a program should include higher education.⁷⁵

As a lifelong educator, McKenzie placed significant importance on the role of education in Indian uplift – indeed, he devoted nearly half his dissertation to analyzing the current state of Indian education and proposing recommendations for its improvement. He viewed educational opportunity as perhaps the most effective lever for Indian advancement:

The first need of the Indian is an education that will fit him to earn his living in contact and in competition with the white man. But any theory of education that proceeds from a belief in his essential inferiority or that would limit him to the lower ranks of life and thought, is a libel on human nature and on the spirit of American democracy. Education of any amount will not make a man...but the

⁷³ Ibid., 35.

⁷⁴ McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 764.

⁷⁵ McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 87.

undoubted dangers that accompany education are greater in proportion to its limitations and inadequacy, not in accordance to its fullness and amount.⁷⁶

Under the Dawes Act, the government began making appropriations for Indian schools and education. Educational expenditures that more or less increased annually for over 20 years did not change the opinion of many Whites that resources spent on Indian education were wasted. Describing the general political sentiment toward Indian education, General T.J. Morgan, speaking at the 1898 Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian, admitted “there was a wide-spread conviction or prejudice that the Indians could not be educated.” Indeed, a United States Senator told him, “This is a simple waste of money. Every dollar that you put into Indian education is thrown away.” The sentiments were echoed by the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, who told Morgan, “You are a fool; you cannot do anything in educating the Indians. There is not a case on record of an educated Indian. You are not only throwing away public money, but you are antagonizing Senators, and you are acting very foolishly.”⁷⁷

Indian education in the early 1900s was a complicated system of reservation schools, reservation boarding schools, and off-reservation boarding schools, without uniform standards of student achievement or efficient methods of school management and oversight. Bemoaning the “multitude of differing policies on the reservations and in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Meeting of the Lake Mohonk Conference of the Friends of the Indian*. (Lake Mohonk, New York: The Lake Mohonk Conference, 1898), 32. Between 1883-1916 government officials, Indian leaders, and White reformers gathered at Lake Mohonk, New York to discuss, debate, formulate, and advocate policy recommendations regarding Indian affairs. Federal Indian policy and law were often influenced by recommendations from Mohonk. The gatherings were called under several different names over the years, but are commonly referred to as Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indian.

the schools,” McKenzie asserted they must be brought “into subjection to the one great controlling plan formulated in Washington.”⁷⁸

A 1903 Report from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs detailed the government’s preferred framework for Indian education. “The ideal system therefore is... to enroll the young child of the camps in the day school, then pass him into the reservation boarding school where he should remain until he has completed the sixth grade, when, if he possesses the natural aptitude to acquire a trade or further education, send him to a non reservation school.”⁷⁹ For the most part, McKenzie agreed with the government’s plan and praised the system “under which the pupils should pass from one type of school to another,” noting it would do much to eliminate reservation agents or superintendants from making arbitrary decisions for personal reasons. Further, providing a standardized model would eliminate a stop-and-go approach among some reservation schools that sent a class of students to a non-reservation school and not again for several years, a practice that, according to McKenzie, “destroys the hope of profit from the step already taken.”⁸⁰ The system’s potential excited McKenzie, and he remarked “in education we see the one phase of governmental activity which has a really bright aspect. Through its schools it has started him [Indians] on the path to a new and better civilization.”⁸¹

78 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 68-69.

79 Annual Report of the United States Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended 30 June 1903. Indian Affairs, Part I. Report of the Commissioner and Appendixes. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903, 5.

80 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 69-70.

81 Ibid., 51.

Although sound in theory, execution of the government's plan proved nearly impossible. Mismanagement and corruption plagued administration of Indian schools, even as annual appropriations increased. Opposition, greed, or simply indifference among Indian agents and Whites working on the reservations led McKenzie to admit "the evils of the system are due, in chief part, to the inconsistencies of administration and the inefficiency of the field force." McKenzie argued that curing ineffective administration required strong and consistent policy and leadership, noting "the chief need in the educational work for the Indian is in the first place a consistent theory of the relations of the parts of the system, and in the second place a thorough and uniform application of theory." Strong central leadership would lead to "prevention of pettier tyrannies of a thousand kinds."⁸²

McKenzie's plan for Indian education combined strategies to improve current conditions with progressive – and for the time, radical – ideas related to Indian adult and higher education. Indians needed educational opportunity, and McKenzie aimed to provide it regardless of age or circumstances. To correct deficiencies in the current system, McKenzie focused his attention in two areas: curriculum and teacher/administrator staffing. At the most fundamental level, organizing an effective Indian educational program required attracting and retaining competent teachers, as "the strength or weakness of a school lies in the quality of the teacher." McKenzie viewed teachers as important models of behavior and attitude, and "who stand for the best in our community life." The teacher "embodies the religion, the culture, the concepts, and the language..." McKenzie understood the critical importance teachers could play in the

82 Ibid., 53, 68-69.

development of young Indian minds, and placed on their shoulders a great responsibility. “If any teacher needs character, culture, education, and skill,” he wrote, “it is the teacher of Indians. Upon him devolves the transformation of a race.”⁸³

Attracting qualified teachers to positions within the Indian Bureau proved difficult for several reasons. Teachers in the Indian service were considered civil servants, and their positions protected under government law. McKenzie lamented that the civil service system was “inelastic and cumbersome,” and “that it does not attract nor ensure a high grade of education or efficiency.” In fact, “it puts a premium...on the average, upon little education and little efficiency.”⁸⁴ McKenzie recognized the civil service’s “permanency of position” attracted many candidates, but “the conditions are such as to discourage rather than to encourage candidacy.” He noted specifically that the time between a qualification exam and an appointment “operates to keep the better many from passing through the process.” Indeed, Francis Leupp, in his Report of the Indian Commissioner in 1906, echoed McKenzie’s criticism, noting that forty-seven percent of candidates offered teaching appointments declined them. Leupp cited the long wait as one of the primary reasons, and also noted “the appointee does not fancy the country or the climate into which he is to be sent, or he regards the salary offered as too low...”⁸⁵ To overcome such obstacles, McKenzie suggested expanding the “merit system” to

⁸³ Ibid., 68-69.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁸⁵ United States Department of the Interior, Office of Indian Affairs: Report of the Commissioner and Appendixes, 1906, Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office., 64.

graduates of standard colleges who sought appointments as teachers.⁸⁶ “A widened list of superior talent,” McKenzie argued, “would allow the office to raise greatly the efficiency of the schools, and hasten equally the civilization of the Indians.”⁸⁷

Once qualified teachers were hired, low salaries and insufficient opportunities for advancement conspired to discourage long-term service with the Indian Bureau. Based on the Indian Commissioner’s Report of 1903, salaries for teachers in the Indian Service, adjusted to 2008 dollars, ranged from \$15,000 – 18,000, and over ninety-nine percent of teachers earned less than \$26,000.⁸⁸ Opportunities for promotion were limited, although McKenzie noted that increasing numbers of superintendent and agent positions might provide additional incentives for men.⁸⁹ Compounding the problem were circumstances unique to the Indian Bureau, including appointments in remote locations, little contact with Whites, steep transportation costs (rail and stage), and an eleven month work year. Given the competencies required for the job and the adverse conditions in which it was carried out, it is not surprising the Indian Bureau failed to attract the level of candidates for which McKenzie hoped.

McKenzie complained that poorly designed organizational structures compromised effectiveness of the Indian Bureau – in particular the role of Superintendent of Indian Education – and criticized appointments of individuals without sufficient knowledge in the areas for which they were hired, deeming such activity “a farce and

86 The merit system allowed graduates of agricultural colleges exemption from examinations to the Indian Service.

87 McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 75-76.

88 Ibid., 77.

89 Ibid., 79. McKenzie noted that such positions will “in large part be denied to the women.”

fraud so far as the good of the Indian is concerned.” He lamented the extent political patronage played in appointment decisions of school inspectors and reservation agents, which limited effectiveness of programs on reservations and policy making in Washington.⁹⁰

The curriculum in Indian schools focused primarily on industrial training in an agricultural context. Land allotment provisions in the Dawes and Burke Acts led bureaucrats in the Indian Bureau to believe that Indians needed knowledge in how to successfully farm their land. As a result, the Bureau responded by filling reservations with teachers and agents who theoretically taught the skills of farming, but the result appeared less like manual education than manual labor. McKenzie complained about the preference for industrial education, declaring that “it is not inability to do things that keeps the Indian idle; it is lack of motive. The main purpose of education is to furnish him with the standards and motives, which will induce him to apply the arts and industries.” Stimulating such motivation required instruction that focused on “why a thing is done” instead of “how it is done.” Although he believed there was a place for industrial education, McKenzie argued “there is a distinction between training and drudgery. Work for work’s sake, and work for the object’s sake are not primarily training.”⁹¹

McKenzie urged an equal division of literary and industrial education, admitting that “the tendency of the present time is for the industrial to dwarf the literary.” He cautioned that routinely substituting manual labor for academic work may have

⁹⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁹¹ Ibid., 71.

unintended future consequences, noting small transgressions “can retard the pupil, the pupil holds back a class, and the class may slacken the pace of a tribe.” He pointed to the dismal results of Indian school graduates in English and math as unfortunate outcomes of the preference for industrial over academic instruction, and cited large classroom sizes as contributing to the problem. “The question is a serious one,” McKenzie argued, “for until the children learn English the rest of their education and of their career halts and waits.”⁹²

To improve the situation, McKenzie called for instruction exclusive to academic pursuits for young Indian children. He framed the idea in practical terms, suggesting it “foolish to expect any industrial work of economic value from a child under ten. He should be kept in school...as many hours a day as his health will permit.” McKenzie asserted that “contact with the English language five hours a day, the average child will learn the language very rapidly.” The intense focus on literary work should continue until the age twelve or fourteen, at which point students (regardless of race) enter a phase of “arrested development” which impedes the ability to effectively study. During these years, emphasis should shift to industrial training until the student regains his ability to study, at which point intense study may resume.⁹³ McKenzie argued that weak secondary schooling for Indians caused them to place little value in education, and it exacerbated the educational chasm relative to Whites. The lack of college preparatory training “reacts

92 Ibid., 72.

93 Ibid., 72-73.

injuriously upon the individual and the race” and may bring to talented Indians

“discouragement and defeat.”⁹⁴

At non-reservation primary and secondary schools – many of which were run by the Indian Bureau – McKenzie strongly advocated use of the Outing system. Developed and popularized by Richard Henry Pratt at Carlisle, the system placed students with white families who lived near the school. By engaging more fully with English, participating in White family life, and observing White traditions and customs, students would more quickly and easily adapt to White society. “No more intimate contact with the realities of our civilization can be imagined,” McKenzie suggested, and if the system could be expanded, “the Indian problem would be solved so much the sooner.” To facilitate expansion, McKenzie called upon the government to provide subsidies to families willing to adopt Indian children. Proponents of the system pointed to well-known Indians of the day, including Dr. Charles Eastman (Santee Sioux), Dr. Carlos Montezuma (Yavapi), and the Reverend Sherman Coolidge (Arapaho) as proof of the civilizing impact of growing up with White families.⁹⁵

Among McKenzie’s many ideas to facilitate Indian assimilation, perhaps the most developed are those related to Indian higher education. In 1908, he raised the issue as one of growing importance, and he anticipated need for Indian access to higher education on a large scale. While the grammar school may have met the majority of Indians’ educational needs up to the present time, “it is not the basis of a high order of civilization,” McKenzie proclaimed. Rather, through Indian primary and secondary

⁹⁴ McKenzie, “The Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 150.

⁹⁵ McKenzie, *The Indian in Relation to the White Population*, 57-58.

schools should spread “an ambition to equal the highest attainments and culture of the white race.” Although McKenzie is somewhat ambivalent about the need for an *Indian college*, he is unequivocal in calling for Indian access to *any* college:

It is probably wise and necessary to maintain colleges especially for Indians in a section where they are so numerous...but as a general thing the student adapted to a college education will get the most out of a college intended primarily for scholars of the dominant race. That the other race needs the college, however, must not ever be entirely forgotten.⁹⁶

A strong primary and secondary educational system provided an essential foundation for Indian assimilation, but for Indians to meaningfully advance socially, politically, and professionally required access to college. In advocating for Indian higher education, McKenzie partially framed the issue in a historical context, and pointed to founding charters among America’s early colleges that granted education for Indians. William and Mary’s charter provided education of Indians and White men, and Dartmouth was founded as Moore’s Charity School for Indians. Harvard’s charter of 1650 speaks of education of “ye English and Indian youth of this country.” In some sense, McKenzie’s ideas of Indian higher education in the early 1900s echoed those of American colonists’ desires to found colleges for Whites in the 1600s – the notion that higher education “is practically the one way of creating that...leadership which is the chief hope and means of attaining an accelerating progress.”⁹⁷

McKenzie saw in higher education a necessary prerequisite to develop race leadership and Indian influence within White power structures, both which Indians sorely needed. It is “safe to say that advanced training is the chief tool of power,” McKenzie

⁹⁶ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 6, 80.

argued, perhaps as much an indictment to White detractors of Indian education as an exhortation for Indian uplift.⁹⁸ Believing that “race leadership must be found or the race will fail to see the new and better opportunities and will sink to rapid ruin,”⁹⁹ McKenzie declared that “I am thoroughly convinced that in the long run the hope for the Indian as a race does not depend upon and cannot come from land or money or political rights, but that it will proceed from and through the broader and higher leadership which will come from a broader and higher education.”¹⁰⁰ Indian leaders could “appeal to [their] people without danger of misinterpretation, and bring...a spirit of advancement and uplift.” A strong leadership class would serve as role models for all Indians and:

Arouse a race deadened by subjugation, segregation and partial pauperization, to encourage the old, and to inspire the young to realize and to enjoy the privileges of the new era – this is the task laid upon members of the Indian race who have seen the vision and who have the courage to sacrifice their time and strength to carry that vision to their brothers who may now be content to stand still.¹⁰¹

Assimilation meant competition with Whites, and higher education would help prepare Indians to compete more effectively. “In the long run their [Indian] leaders must be able to comprehend all the methods of their white competitors,” McKenzie declared. “They must have the widest of wisdom if they are to lead a race wisely to the highest goal.” Until Indians firmly grasped the value of higher education, McKenzie asserted the

98 McKenzie, “The American Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 150.

99 McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 770.

100 McKenzie to Parker, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1371.

101 McKenzie, “The Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 155.

government needed to provide “whatever is necessary to encourage and enable Indian youth to enter upon the higher paths.”¹⁰²

Differences in the scope and quality of Indian academic preparation exacerbated social and cultural chasms between Indian and White youth when the former entered White institutions. As a result, McKenzie noted a “very considerable reluctance” on the part of Indians to “enter into daily competition or comparison with a large group of whites.”¹⁰³ In a letter to colleague Arthur Parker regarding the SAI’s higher education platform, McKenzie noted that “...it strikes me that the critics of our third plank are somewhat panic stricken over our demands for a higher curriculum. The very fact that so much criticism is aroused seems to point out that our ideas are seriously taken...” McKenzie told Parker Indians were blinded by industrial training, and lamented that in the industrial model there “is no opportunity to acquire anything more than the rudiments of mental education.”¹⁰⁴

To help stimulate college enrollment among Indians, McKenzie advanced a theoretical framework for Indian higher education based “on the assumption that whatever is advisable for white youth is equally advisable for Indians.” The primary feature of his plan called for turning either reservation boarding schools or non-reservation boarding schools into combination secondary schools and junior colleges.¹⁰⁵ Staffed with teachers who received “the highest training which the country affords,” the

102 Ibid., 150.

103 Ibid. 150. McKenzie to Parker, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1371.

104 McKenzie to Parker, 8 January 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1465.

105 McKenzie, “The Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 150.

institutions would prepare “the ambitious and altruistic of the race for service and leadership,” and “should revive the spirit of Hampton in a school of more advanced requirements.”¹⁰⁶ After two years of study at the junior college, students would transition to White universities to complete their education. McKenzie predicted that in ten years enrollment might amount to at least 1,000 students, or 1.1 percent of the Indian school population.¹⁰⁷

McKenzie believed his plan offered several advantages. First, “it would emphasize and re-define” the value of education throughout the Indian system. Second, the strategy combined sorely needed college preparation in the secondary grades with two years of college training, which facilitated Indians’ transition to White colleges to finish a bachelor’s degree. Fourth, the plan provided a curriculum that addressed educational needs “peculiar to the Indian,” including Indian studies, as McKenzie noted “few white colleges pay any attention to Indian history or Indian problems.” Finally, in a particularly bold suggestion, McKenzie thought the schools could welcome “Indians from the countries to the south and so work to international comity as well as start a movement for the welfare of the millions of natives still surviving on this continent.”¹⁰⁸

As he encouraged educators, politicians, and Indians themselves to support Indian higher education, McKenzie called on America’s “great universities” to go even further. Eminent faculty of anthropology, ethnology, and history studied Indian culture of the

106 McKenzie to Parker, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1371. Although McKenzie appreciated Hampton for its work with Negroes and Indians, he questioned the quality of instruction and standards. He stated to Parker: “...Hampton does not so prepare them [Indians].” McKenzie to Parker, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1371.

107 McKenzie, “The Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 154.

108 Ibid., 151.

past, but McKenzie wondered why so little interest existed in studying contemporary Indians, and the “the means by which he may realize his highest possibilities as a citizen and fellow-worker.” To stimulate interest in current Indian affairs, McKenzie called for “one or more endowments...to establish chairs of race development with particular reference to the native race of the American continent.” He felt such focused research and study “should mean vast things, not only for the United States, but for the uncounted millions of native Americans in the countries to the south of us. The nation and the continent call for this great new chair in sociology. Do we not owe this to the people we have so largely dispossessed?”¹⁰⁹

The Founding of the Society of American Indians

Three prominent Indians, Dr. Charles Eastman, his brother Reverend John Eastman, and Dr. Sherman Coolidge first discussed organizing a pan-Indian, or intertribal, Indian rights organization at the turn of the twentieth century. The three leaders concluded the time was not yet right to broadly advance the idea, believing such a movement “would not be understood either by our own people or the American people in general,” present a “grave danger of arousing the antagonism of the Bureau,” and compromise the many progressively-oriented Indians affiliated with Government service and programs.¹¹⁰ McKenzie had first met Sherman Coolidge at the Wind River Boarding School in 1903, where Coolidge worked as an Episcopalian missionary, and while at Ohio State he often invited Charles Eastman and Coolidge to lecture in his classes and at

¹⁰⁹ McKenzie, “The Assimilation of the American Indian,” 771.

¹¹⁰ Charles A. Eastman, *The Indian Today* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1915), 131. The “Bureau” referred to the U.S. government’s Bureau of Indian Affairs.

public events. As the three Indians continued conversations about organizing, it is likely they shared their idea with McKenzie.

Indian political and cultural interests progressed slowly in the first few years of the twentieth century. By the end of the first decade, however, McKenzie believed the environment had changed, and that Indians could effectively organize to provide a strong and united Indian perspective on Indian affairs and policy-making in Washington. Believing that the “conditions are ripe for organization,” he resurrected the idea of a pan-Indian advocacy organization, began corresponding with several prominent Indian leaders about the idea – including Eastman and Coolidge – and in 1909 called for an Indian-led national conference on Indian affairs.¹¹¹

Several circumstances likely influenced McKenzie’s interest in formally establishing a pan-tribal Indian organization. First, the passing of the Burke Act in 1906, which exacerbated confusion regarding Indian citizenship, created a sense of urgency for a comprehensive federal framework regulating Indian political and legal status that could be applied consistently among all Indians. Second, an Indian organization could leverage the Progressive spirit and political optimism sweeping over the nation. Finally, McKenzie no doubt viewed the formation of the National Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909 as further evidence the time was appropriate to establish a similar organization for Indians. Interestingly, W.E.B. DuBois, who played an important role in founding the NAACP, became an early associate member of the SAI and,

111 David Clark, “Representing Indians: Indigenous Fugitives and the Society of American Indians in the Making of Common Culture” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2004), 15-16.

according to Hazel Hertzberg, its only African-American member at the time.¹¹²

DuBois's affiliation with the SAI likely represented more an expression of reform solidarity than a strong interest in Indian affairs, but his membership characterized the optimism and idealistic spirit of the Progressive era.

McKenzie failed in his efforts to organize an Indian conference in 1909, but in a letter he sent that fall to generate interest in an Indian-led advocacy organization, McKenzie indicated what he perceived as Indians' basic dilemma. "The chief reason we continue to have an Indian problem," he suggested, "is because the public generally does not believe that the Indian is capable of education, culture, or high morality."¹¹³ As Indian policy-making rarely solicited Indian input, formation of an Indian organization would promote Indian advancement by giving, as Lucy Maddox suggested, "Indian people an entry into an ongoing public conversation that was all about them but excluded them."¹¹⁴ McKenzie's letter, however, hinted at an even more ambitious agenda than simple inclusion. Suggesting a more direct approach to shape the debate, McKenzie asserted that "the time has come when a 'Mohonk by Indians' can do even more for the country than a 'Mohonk for Indians.'"¹¹⁵

¹¹² Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity*, 83.

¹¹³ McKenzie letter to prospective members, 15 September 1909, SAI Papers.

¹¹⁴ Lucy Maddox, *Citizen Indians: Native American Intellectuals, Race, and Reform*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 90.

¹¹⁵ McKenzie letter to prospective members, 15 September 1909, SAI papers. McKenzie's comment reflected the hope that an Indian-organized "Mohonk-like" conference would engage broader numbers of Indians and, therefore, provide the basis for more aggressive pursuit of political and legal remedies to Indian problems.

In April 1911, McKenzie convened in Columbus, Ohio a meeting that brought together six Progressive Indian leaders to publicly announce the formation of the American Indian Association and develop plans for an inaugural conference to be held that fall at Ohio State University.¹¹⁶ Shortly thereafter, a Temporary Executive Committee was formed, consisting of 18 prominent Indians, and a Statement of Purpose drafted, the preamble of which read:

The Temporary Executive Committee of The American Indian Association declares that the time has come when the American Indian race should contribute, in a more united way, its influence and exertion with the rest of the citizens of the United States in all lines of progress and reform, for the welfare of the Indian race in particular, and humanity in general.¹¹⁷

The Statement of Purpose comprised six principles that addressed concepts of equal rights, good citizenship, and race betterment, and asserted that in all Association activities, “the honor of the race and the good of the country will always be paramount.”¹¹⁸

The call to the 1911 conference issued by the committee bore an unmistakable McKenzian influence. Indians and non-Indians interested in the Indian problem were

116 Indian progressives, many of whom were educated in White institutions, lived and worked primarily in White society. Most were staunch assimilationists, believing Indian advancement required education, hard work, and aligning Indian attitudes, values, and lifestyle to American (White) culture. The organization was founded as the American Indian Association, and the name was changed to the Society of American Indians shortly thereafter. Although some accounts differ regarding the composition of the six Indians present at Columbus, SAI records indicate the group consisted of Dr. Charles Eastman, Dr. Carlos Montezuma, Thomas Sloan, Charles Dagenett, Laura M. Cornelius, and Henry Standing Bear. See Report of the Executive Council on the Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of the Society of American Indians, Washington, D.C. 1912., SAI Papers. Arthur Parker was also invited to the meeting at Columbus, but a fire at the New York State Capitol, which housed the New York State Museum where he served as an archeologist, precluded Parker’s attendance. Arthur C. Parker to Fayette A. McKenzie, 1 April 1911. SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1337.

117 The Purpose of the American Indian Association. Undated. SAI Papers, Roll 4, Frame 1018.

118 Ibid.

urged to gather at Columbus to address such issues as ineffective federal Indian policy, White responsibility and sense of duty to Indians, Indian self-help through race consciousness and race pride, and the positive contributions Indians could make in American society.¹¹⁹

The Society set out to create awareness in mainstream White culture of Indian intellectual and civic capability. As part of that effort, the SAI highlighted accomplishments of successful, progressive Indians, many of them leaders within the SAI. These Indians – well acculturated to White society – served as spokespeople for the organization, and, in the eyes of White America, spokespeople for their race. Although their progressive views did not wholly represent the attitudes among many Indians living on reservations, the messages of self-help, hard work, and focus on education and Christian values fit comfortably within White notions of civilized society.

The Society's inaugural conference opened on Columbus Day, 12 October 1911, a symbolic date likely chosen by McKenzie. In a letter to inviting participants to the failed 1909 Indian conference, he envisioned a new dawn at Columbus, writing, "even as the navigator Columbus discovered the old Indian in 1492, may we not hope that the city of Columbus shall discover the "new Indian."¹²⁰ From his faculty position at Ohio State – and given the official title of "Local Representative" – McKenzie organized much of the formal and informal proceedings of the event, from logistics to program development. Working with Arthur Parker, he helped develop conference platforms, recruited speakers,

¹¹⁹ Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity*, 37.

¹²⁰ Letter from McKenzie, 15 September 1909. SAI Papers. Although Columbus Day did not become an official U.S. federal holiday until 1934, certain groups and regions had celebrated 12 October as Columbus Day since the 1860s.

designed the conference program, and mobilized community support, including securing endorsements from the City of Columbus, Ohio State University, and several local civic and religious organizations.

Robert Valentine, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, opened the conference with an address professing his hope that the organization will “broaden its membership till it includes every critic of the government, every class and shade of opinion.... We need an All-Indian public opinion.”¹²¹ While wonderful in theory, Valentine’s desire for a platform inclusive of all viewpoints but single-minded in purpose was unrealistic for an organization whose membership represented several different tribes and several different ideological positions – indeed, members within the same tribe sometimes expressed different opinions. Disagreements among members – including those on the Executive Committee – plagued conference discussions, but despite the contentious nature of the proceedings, most attendees considered the 1911 gathering a significant success. Prominent Indians came together to form an organization committed to promoting advancement of all Indians, regardless of tribal affiliation. The future of the Society of American Indians – and that of Indian advancement – looked bright.¹²²

¹²¹ Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity*, 60.

¹²² With the success of the 1911 gathering and McKenzie’s connections within the Academy and Washington, D.C., Parker relied heavily on his council in planning future conferences, seeking McKenzie’s input on topics such as conference theme, agenda, and administrative details. For planning of the 1912 conference, see correspondence between McKenzie and Parker, SAI Papers, roll 4, frames 1428 – 1452. In the summer of 1913, Parker wrote of the upcoming conference, “I should welcome from you a suggestion somewhat detailed as to the precise form as to which the program should take this year.” Parker to McKenzie, 13 June 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1473. In 1914, McKenzie responded to a request for speakers and topics for the 1914 annual conference. McKenzie to Charles Dagenett, 3 July 1914, SAI papers, roll 5, frames 43-45. After the 1913 conference Parker expressed his gratitude for McKenzie’s assistance. “Very keen appreciation of the organization for your services was manifested throughout the entire Conference and as Mr. Chase said at the last day ‘most of us were dumb because we could not

McKenzie and the Society of American Indians

The Society of American Indians, whose creation marked what one historian called the most significant day in Indian history, became the first national Indian-controlled political movement in U.S. history, and “the most enduring effort...before WWII to mobilize into national organizations by Natives.”¹²³ Although the idea for a pan-Indian organization had been discussed by Indian leaders in the first few years of the twentieth century, many scholars credit the SAI’s formation to McKenzie’s diligence and vision.¹²⁴ Even Indian leaders at the time recognized McKenzie’s significant contributions in helping the SAI become a reality. Reflecting on the organization’s founding, Rosa B. LaFlesch called McKenzie the “Father of this movement” and that “Prof. McKenzie has had this in mind and working on it for several years...”¹²⁵

express our gratitude for the unselfish labors to which you have devoted yourself. Nothing we can say would mean anything.” Parker to McKenzie, 31 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 23.

123 Clark, “Representing Indians,” 15.

124 Hazel Hertzberg called McKenzie the “father” of the SAI, and “the man who took the initiative in the formation of the organization. Hazel Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements* (Syracuse University Press, 1971), 31. David Clark asserted that McKenzie “helped organize” the SAI. Clark, “Representing Indians,” 15. Patricia Furnish suggested that McKenzie encouraged and helped found the SAI. Patricia Furnish, “‘Aboriginally Yours’: The Society of American Indians and U.S. Citizenship, 1890-1924” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 2005), 10. John Siegel argued that McKenzie “provided the intellectual stimulus” for the SIA’s creation, and his ideas “the intellectual framework” of the organization. John Siegel, “Two Cultures, One Cause: Biculturalism and Native American Reform in the Career of Arthur Caswell Parker (Gawasowaneh), 1906-1925” (PhD diss., Purdue University, 1993), 60-61. Tom Holm wrote that McKenzie “proposed” the formation of the organization, and was its “father.” Tom Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs: Native Americans and Whites in the Progressive Era* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 58. Wilcomb Washburn asserted that McKenzie, “played a key role in bringing Indian leaders together at Columbus in 1911.” Wilcomb Washburn, “The Society of American Indians,” *Indian Historian* 3 (Winter, 1970), 22-23.

125 Letter from Rosa B. LaFlesch to Arthur C. Parker, 25 November 1911 SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 706. LaFlesch was the Society’s administrative secretary. Other SAI leaders referred to McKenzie as the “Father” of the organization, including Arthur Parker.

The SAI's formation coincided with a growing interest among Whites for Native American culture, art, and music. Most SAI annual conferences included Indian entertainment for the public, which largely consisted of stereotypical depictions of Indians in tribal costume engaging in war dances and rituals. Although controversial among SAI leaders, many of them viewed such exhibitions as a way to educate curious and interested Whites about Indians' rich culture and heritage. However, Melissa Wick Patterson suggested an important irony, noting the elements of Native culture that allowed SAI members to exploit White interest limited Indians ability to pursue their goals of citizenship and legal rights, as exhibitions and performances perpetuated stereotypical images of Indians.¹²⁶ In time, McKenzie faced similar ironies in his work in black higher education.

The SAI's agenda sought to further race progress, hone race pride, and develop race leadership, but the primary goal among SAI leaders focused on citizenship for Indians. For McKenzie and other SAI leaders, citizenship symbolized the apex of the civilization process.¹²⁷

McKenzie's experience and connections allowed him to effectively engage both prominent Indians and influential members of the White establishment. His long and intense involvement in Indian affairs – including his living and teaching on the Shoshoni reservation in 1903-04 – his passionate writing on behalf of Indian rights, and his involvement in the founding of the SAI demonstrated to many Indians he had their best

126 Michelle Wick Patterson, "'Real' Indian Songs: The Society of American Indians and the Use of Native American Culture as a Means of Reform," *American Indian Quarterly*, 26, no.1 (Winter, 2002), 62.

127 Holm, *The Great Confusion in Indian Affairs*, 58-59, Furnish, "'Aboriginally Yours.'"

interest at heart. From a White perspective, McKenzie's academic career and faculty position at Ohio State, coupled with personal and professional connections he developed while living and studying in Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C. (including General Richard Pratt and M.G. Brumbaugh), granted him credibility among academics and some in the political establishment. He skillfully navigated between the two groups, articulating arguments, managing expectations, and advancing ideas for Indian assimilation.

One of most prominent academics studying and writing about Indians in the early 1900s, McKenzie's positions on Indian legal rights, citizenship status, and educational opportunities aligned with those of the Society's Progressive leaders. Yet, because he was White, McKenzie did not bring to his Society role the emotional burdens of tribal affiliation and reservation fatigue common among Indians. The absence of these perspectives certainly compromised McKenzie's evaluation of Indian affairs, but it also provided him intellectual freedom unconstrained by tribal-based ideology, and led in part to the considerable influence he enjoyed within the organization. McKenzie exercised his guidance primarily through private correspondence with SAI officials, most notably Arthur C. Parker. Although members of the Society's Executive Committee respected and generally liked McKenzie, Parker recognized to a greater extent than his colleagues McKenzie's significant value to the organization, including his ability to solicit White sympathy and support for the cause. For his part, McKenzie viewed himself as an important link to the White community, and understood that despite the significant intellectual and professional achievements of Indian leaders, including Montezuma,

Eastman, and Parker, their race compromised their efforts in advancing Indian interests in a White culture. Aware that meaningful Indian advancement required White support, McKenzie hoped to help generate interest and support among important White constituents.

Sensitivity among Society members over White control of the organization threatened the organization's early survival and hindered the Society throughout its existence. McKenzie understood Indians' distrust of Whites, and he realized that speculation of white interest driving Society administrative policy compromised organizational effectiveness. As a result, the Society adopted measures to limit the influence of non-Indian members, and the membership also fiercely debated the role of Indian members who worked for the U.S. government. Despite these debates, McKenzie's role in the founding of the organization, his close relationship with most of the Society's leadership, including Arthur Parker, and his established and well-respected work on Indian affairs allowed him a more prominent public role not granted to other non-Indians.

McKenzie viewed himself as someone who could effectively advance Indian interests with Whites, but he understood the danger in assuming too public an image in his work with the Society. He admitted to Parker that "Whatever I may say is subject to two suspicions: First that my race prevents me understanding the situation; second, that I may have some ulterior motive."¹²⁸ Despite Parker's entreaties for McKenzie's help in administrative matters, McKenzie remained apprehensive about assuming too public a role. "I am always embarrassed by doubt in my mind as to whether I shall act and speak,

128 Fayette McKenzie to Arthur Parker, 31 October 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1346.

or whether I shall contribute most by silence. Everyone who says anything to me tells me to proceed and that the Indians have confidence in me and I am glad and believe that is so, even though doubtful as to what extent that confidence involves action.”¹²⁹ When McKenzie offered Columbus, Ohio as the site for the second annual SAI conference in 1912, he recognized “that there may be objections to the place because of the fear that I am absorbing the whole Society.”¹³⁰ Fearing too public a role might create antagonisms toward him and endanger the movement, McKenzie labored primarily behind the scenes, utilizing his close relationship with Parker to advance ideas and recommendations.

The contentious discussion at the 1911 annual SAI conference largely grew out of the perceived influence of the Bureau of Indian Affairs within the Society. Although several Indian delegates to the conference worked for the Bureau and supported its efforts, many Indians regarded the Bureau with contempt, and viewed it as representing White oppression and control. The Society was expressly founded *for* Indians and *by* Indians, and many members reacted unfavorably to the slightest hint of Bureau intrusion in its affairs. Indeed, a perception persisted on reservations that Indians affiliated with the Bureau worked *against* the race. McKenzie acknowledged this fear, noting that “a considerable body of Indians are positively afraid of and opposed to the government,” and that they feel “a government employee is not morally free to express his own independent judgment.”¹³¹ That Charles Dagenett (Peoria), who as Supervisor of Employment was the highest ranking Indian in the Bureau, was elected Secretary-

129 McKenzie to Parker, 5 December 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1361.

130 McKenzie to Parker, 3 January 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1374.

131 McKenzie to Parker, 10 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1351.

Treasurer of the Society at the first conference did little to calm these fears, and instead further contributed to suspicion among Indians of White control of the Society.

The most outspoken critic about the Bureau's perceived influence in the Society was Dr. Carlos Montezuma, a well-known and respected physician. One of the six Indians present at the 1911 meeting that founded the Society and a disciple of Richard Henry Pratt's arch assimilationist philosophy (Montezuma was a graduate of Pratt's Carlisle School), Montezuma detested the Bureau of Indian Affairs and reservation life. Although supportive of the Society in its formation, he soon became convinced it was a puppet of the Bureau and resigned from the organization shortly before the inaugural conference, with "regret [that] I had any responsibility for the organizing of the Association of Educated Indians."¹³²

SAI conventions were powerful examples of Indian possibility *in a White culture and context*. The Society consisted primarily of middle-class Indians who spoke English, lived among Whites, and as assimilated Indians represented the success and ideals the Society hoped to promote to the entire race. Yet the majority of the nation's Indians – the population for whom the Society advocated – were in many respects quite different than most members of the organization. Most lived on reservations, distrusted the government, lacked formal education, spoke little, if any, English, depended on government rations, and were generally opposed to assimilation. For most Indians, the tribe and reservation represented their community and, despite its limitations, provided strength and support. Tribal bonds often trumped racial unity. For Indian proponents of assimilation, however, including the majority of Society members, racial unity transcended tribal affiliation, as assimilationists asserted

¹³² Letter from Montezuma to Charles Dagenett, 25 September 1911, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 436.

that Indians entered society as individuals, not as tribes. McKenzie and Society leaders were well aware of the disconnect within Indian populations regarding this issue, and expressed concern that Indians who did not support the Society's ideals might disrupt its progress. When Colorado was suggested as the location for the 1912 annual conference, Society leaders – including McKenzie – feared that local Indians would be attracted “who of necessity would have but little comprehension of the great problem and purposes of the Conference.” McKenzie indicated to Parker that “it is important, as you will surely say, that the progressive elements of the race, retain the direction of this movement.”¹³³

Cultivating White Membership

McKenzie understood the importance of developing a strong and influential base of White members, and Arthur Parker concurred. “I am sure that we all wish you to secure for us as many members as you can and win for us the right kind of friends,” Parker suggested to McKenzie shortly after the 1911 Conference.¹³⁴ McKenzie recommended to Parker that he officially lead efforts to secure White members, suggesting “that as a general thing, the Indians of the organization would work for active members and might wish to rely largely upon me to be their agent in securing associate members. ...If, by my university connections I can bring any to the support of the cause I shall be only too glad to do so.”¹³⁵ Generating White support required McKenzie's official involvement at

133 McKenzie to Parker, 27 December 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1371.

134 Parker to McKenzie, 11 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1353.

135 Ibid. At its 1911 annual conference, the Society created three classes of membership. Active members were United States Indians with at least 1/16 “Indian blood.” Indian Associates were Indians living outside the United States, including Canada, Latin America, and South America. Associate members were persons of “non-Indian blood” interested in and welfare and advancement of Indians. Only Active and Indian

some level in the Society, and absent other White participation, prospective White members might question the respectability of the organization. McKenzie recounted to Parker just such a circumstance, remarking, “you will pardon this personal statement and not allow it to injure either me or the cause, when I say that a man of considerable power told me...the only person whose name appeared on the letter-head and whom he could feel sure of was myself. Of course that is not fair but we need to use as many lines of influence as we can.”¹³⁶ Aware of the delicate issue of White involvement in Society affairs, McKenzie told Parker “it would of course facilitate matters greatly if I could have some definite authority to speak in these matters, but that may not be possible.”¹³⁷

With the endorsement of the Society’s Executive Committee, McKenzie was elected Chairman of Associate Memberships in 1912 and began to aggressively court White interest in the Society, soliciting the support of academics, politicians, and religious leaders. In a written appeal to prospective members, he articulated themes designed to resonate with progressive White thinking, and called on Whites’ sense of duty to their Indian brethren. Juxtaposing themes of White responsibility with White guilt, McKenzie asserted that the desire to civilize the Indian had failed primarily due to “frequent erroneous judgment” on the part of Whites. Because of these mistakes, he asked, “we owe it, do we not, not only to the native people but also to ourselves to

Associate members could hold office, and Associate members were not allowed on the conference floor unless granted special permission.

136 McKenzie to Parker, 15 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1355. In a similar matter two years later, McKenzie again suggested to Parker that it might be desirable to use his or Dr. Parish’s (Secretary for Associate Members) at the head of a letter soliciting associate memberships for the Society. “I feel that the appeal of non-Indians will mean more to the non-informed whites who ought to join.” McKenzie to Parker, 17 December 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 27.

137 McKenzie to Parker, 15 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1355.

demonstrate an efficient friendship for the Indian?” He asserted that a capable group of Indian leaders was in place take up the cause, declaring “there has been developed, or there has survived, a body of Indian men and women who have the vision and spirit” who are prepared to lead their people in “a splendid upward struggle.” McKenzie argued the movement toward Indian self-help “is so great that the friends of the race cannot afford to let the plans fail of success,” and through the right organization, “a race consciousness and a race confidence will be developed.” In closing, he appealed to Whites’ moral character as citizens of the United States, suggesting “the greatness of nation and of self is measured in the ability to see beyond race lines.”¹³⁸ Over the next few years, McKenzie’s campaign proved extremely successful, and by 1914 the organization boasted over 400 associate members.

The Legal Aid Committee

The Dawes and Burke Acts did little to clarify Indians’ uncertain legal and political status which, along with general ambiguities in federal Indian policy, created confusion and corruption in real estate transactions involving Indians. McKenzie pointed to the circumstance as another sad outcome of poorly executed policy, and he suggested the Society create an organizational mechanism to help facilitate settlement of Indian land claims, as Indians often did not have financial resources or familiarity with the justice system to pursue legal recourse. In January 1912, the Society’s Executive Committee proposed the creation of a Legal Aid Committee to address such issues, consisting of equal representation from Active and Associate members. The Committee would employ attorneys to undertake Indian claims at appropriate fees and carefully

¹³⁸ Fayette McKenzie. Undated letter, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1335.

monitor legal processes. Start-up costs were estimated at \$5,000, and solicitations for financial support sent to Associate members.

Although sound in principle, the initial aims of the Committee proved too ambitious to implement. As champion of the idea, McKenzie assumed the task of soliciting financial support and mobilizing attorneys interested in Indian affairs. He largely failed on both fronts. Two appeals generated only \$555 in contributions, and although several lawyers expressed interest in the initiative, they “were all too busy to undertake...service on such a commission.”¹³⁹ Frustrated at the lack of progress, McKenzie advanced an idea to interest law schools in the matter, “partly as a matter of philanthropy and partly as a laboratory scheme, giving us certain services for free.” He further wondered if attorneys might be engaged to serve “without pay until the cases were won and the fees collected.”¹⁴⁰ Nothing ever came of both ideas.

Unwilling to abandon hope, but with little funding and outside support, McKenzie suggested a more modest approach. At McKenzie’s suggestion, Sherman Coolidge, then President of the Society, appointed him and Arthur Parker to serve as the Legal Aid Committee, and McKenzie shifted his strategy from coordinating direct legal intervention on behalf of individual Indians to lobbying efforts on behalf of the Stephens Bill. The proposed federal legislation, which called for opening to Indian tribes the United States Court of Claims, would help facilitate settlement of long neglected Indian land claims.¹⁴¹

139 Report of the Legal Aid Committee, 15 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 15. For one of the appeal letters, see McKenzie letter to Dear Friend, 20 April 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1471.

140 Letter from McKenzie to Parker, 30 March 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1467.

141 The Stephens Bill was named after John H. Stephens, Congressman from Texas who served as Chairman of the Committee of Indian Affairs from 1911-1917. McKenzie called it “one of the half dozen

If the legislation passed, the Legal Aid Committee would “act as an advisory board for all tribes and bands in need of its assistance....and offer its services to Indians in devising ways and means to bring their claims efficiently and economically before the Court of Claims.” McKenzie and Parker believed that Committee oversight of the process would provide Indians peace of mind and assurance that “no unnecessary expense on the one side, or cruel exploitation on the other, shall longer be associated with the attainment of justice for the Indian.”¹⁴² Society members heartily endorsed the new strategy, leading Parker to inform McKenzie that “you have authority *carte blanche* to proceed in any way you deem advisable.”¹⁴³ McKenzie never fully utilized the authority granted him. Suffering from health issues after his parents passed away in August 1913 and February 1914, he sought to recuperate by travelling to France in summer 1914. Shortly after he returned, his attention increasingly diverted to his candidacy and subsequent work at Fisk. The Stephens Bill was never passed, and the Legal Aid Committee quietly dissolved.

McKenzie’s Philosophical Influence on the Society of American Indians

McKenzie enjoyed a good working relationship with nearly all of the Society’s leaders, and many solicited his input regarding Society affairs. His significant private role in SAI business was manifest largely through Arthur Parker, his closest ally among the organization’s leadership. As Secretary of the Society from 1911-1915, Parker managed

great measures critically necessary in the solution of the Indian problem.” McKenzie to John H. Stephens, 20 December 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 30.

¹⁴² Report of the Legal Aid Committee, 15 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 15.

¹⁴³ Parker to McKenzie, 31 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 23.

most aspects of Society business, and his access to information helped him – and McKenzie – more effectively frame and advance the Society’s agenda while navigating internal politics and personalities. What started as a close working relationship during the organization’s infancy developed into a deep and lasting friendship spanning several decades. That the two men agreed with one another on fundamental Indian issues including Indian assimilation certainly helped foster their relationship and allowed for frank and candid discussion regarding Society matters. More than that, however, they needed and required each other’s intellectual, political, and emotional support.

Parker was not yet thirty years old when he assumed the position of SAI Secretary/Treasurer and, although already quite accomplished professionally (he did not, however, possess commensurate academic credentials), he looked to McKenzie as a mentor and father figure. Parker respected McKenzie’s commitment to Indian uplift and his deep knowledge of Indian affairs, and his letters to McKenzie express a sense of admiration and respect not typical in Parker’s correspondence with other Society leaders:

I wish to rely upon you for a great deal of advice in all matters pertaining to the Society and I do not wish you to feel any hesitancy in helping me decide things or in giving advice before decisions are made. I do not know of any one who has a better grasp of the Indian situation or a more scientific one as you have, notwithstanding the fact that you are unfortunately not of ‘Indian blood.’”¹⁴⁴

Shortly after the Society’s formation, Parker advised McKenzie that “I think it well for you to be in touch with all matters as I am rather compelling you to become my tutor,”¹⁴⁵ and “your letters and advice are ever welcome and no one has a better right to manifest an active interest than you. Scold me or encourage me as you see is necessary

¹⁴⁴ Parker to McKenzie, 6 November 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1354.

¹⁴⁵ Parker to McKenzie, 20 November 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1356.

and let me have facts that will put me right.”¹⁴⁶ Parker sought McKenzie’s input in all manner of Society affairs. In developing strategy for lobbying efforts for the Carter Code Bill, Parker pleaded “I am therefore looking to you, as the father of the movement, to advise me and to suggest a course of action.”¹⁴⁷ During the process of creating the Society’s constitution, Parker forwarded McKenzie a draft and noted, “please rip it where it is bad, too ambitious, or not practicable.”¹⁴⁸

Parker relied on McKenzie’s advice throughout their association with the Society, and he benefited from McKenzie’s shrewd political approaches to the fierce infighting that plagued the Society. As internal struggles became more acute in 1914-1915, Parker looked to McKenzie as a steadying influence for the organization, and pleaded for his friend’s attendance at the 1914 SAI annual conference, suggesting “...the Society looks to you as the Father to give the backbone stiffening needful to logic and sanity.”¹⁴⁹ A year later, after McKenzie had assumed the Presidency at Fisk and was less active in Society affairs, Parker again requested McKenzie’s attendance at the fall Conference, noting “I have wondered how we could safely get along without you. Perhaps we can, but your message and addresses each year have so proven the basis of action and the strongest appeal which we had in point of logic.”¹⁵⁰

146 Parker to McKenzie, 8 November 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1350.

147 Parker to McKenzie, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1372.

148 Parker to McKenzie, 11 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1353.

149 Parker to McKenzie, 26 September 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 48.

150 Parker to McKenzie, 4 September 1915, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 71.

Parker steadfastly believed that Society leaders must be Indian – historian Hazel Hertzberg asserted that “Parker was determined that the SAI should be run by Indians” – but his sentiment did not diminish his desire for McKenzie’s wisdom and counsel.¹⁵¹ In 1916, shortly before Parker was elected Society president, he admitted that “I am greatly in need of your advice in many lines.”¹⁵² Parker’s admiration for McKenzie is demonstrated in a letter he wrote in 1913 to Franklin K. Lane, then U.S. Secretary of the Interior, nominating McKenzie as the next Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Writing without McKenzie’s knowledge, Parker cited his friend’s “broad experience,” “very special knowledge of the Indian,” and his “rare understanding of the legal and social status of our native wards” as attributes that “fit him as the ideal man for the place.” “I know of no fitter person for the difficult task that falls upon the Office of the Indian Commissioner,” Parker declared.¹⁵³

McKenzie’s close association with Parker provided him a trusted and private conduit to advance his ideas and recommendations for the Society. Through Parker, McKenzie exerted significant influence on the Society’s agenda from 1911-1915, including development of organizational platforms, political strategies, personnel recommendations, conference programming, and operational issues. Parker enthusiastically promoted McKenzie’s work when and where possible, but recognized the need to for some restraint given the delicate nature of Society relationships and fear over White control. “All your writings have been full of suggestions and have analyzed the

¹⁵¹ Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity*, 91.

¹⁵² Parker to McKenzie, 4 April 1916, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 79.

¹⁵³ Letter from Arthur Parker to Franklin K. Lane, 8 April 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frames 833-834.

situation better than a host of other writers,” Parker told McKenzie. “I think some means might be found to give your work wider publicity, but the difficulty always has been that only a few minds are capable of grasping great principles when small details, close at hand, obscure the vision.”¹⁵⁴ McKenzie frequently and tactfully offered his unsolicited opinion on a range of issues, and occasionally sought Parker’s counsel. Discussing his idea to establish an Indian junior college, McKenzie offered that “I submit this to you in confidence and ask that you advise with me concerning it. It is so important and yet too delicate a matter to achieve, that I think it dangerous to submit it in its present chaotic state to general discussion.”¹⁵⁵

An intriguing aspect of McKenzie and Parker’s friendship deals with the emotional support they provided one another. Recognizing their individual and collective accomplishments within the Society were inextricably linked, they motivated one another by praising each other’s work and commenting how important the other was to the Society’s interests. McKenzie often questioned his value to the organization and wondered if his contributions were of any substance, but Parker assayed his notions and encouraged his continued efforts for the Society. He often praised McKenzie’s contributions, and expressed embarrassment at the lack of gratitude among Society members for McKenzie’s work on their behalf:

...Unlike the Indian of tradition, the modern Indian is most ungrateful. This lack of appreciation is splendid inspiration to the soul that is developing altruism, however, our neglect is not an actual expression of a thankless heart. I have discovered that a great of it comes from a sort of awed admiration for your

154 Parker to McKenzie, 17 March 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 37.

155 McKenzie to Parker, 29 December 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1371.

creative ability of your mind, the feeling that nothing which could be said would be sufficiently strong to express the true gratitude that does exist.¹⁵⁶

While McKenzie downplayed his role, Parker frequently complained about the volume of Society work, the meager compensation, and its intrusion to other parts of his life, leading him to hint at resignation.¹⁵⁷ Realizing that Parker's departure would threaten the Society's existence and compromise his influence in Society affairs, McKenzie often complimented Parker's work, noting that "it seems to me that you are about as nearly in the ideal position as a person could well hope to be, acceptable to all and efficient in the work."¹⁵⁸ When Parker suggested that the Society's demands were too taxing given his other professional and personal responsibilities, McKenzie exhorted him to stay with the Society, noting "it is not impossible that you are the only man who can save the situation and that you may have to do it by constant correspondence, keeping all in touch one with the other, and keeping all satisfied that equal justice is being arranged for."¹⁵⁹

Fayette McKenzie sought to carefully balance his efforts in furthering Indian advancement with a restraint that respected the Society's mantra: *for* Indians and *by* Indians. McKenzie risked compromising SAI effectiveness by pursuing too public a profile that might raise suspicions of White control, yet he also needed to solicit White constituents important in helping advance Indians' political agenda. Navigating among the variety of organizational interests, competing ideas, and personal relationships to promote Indian interests required

156 Parker to McKenzie, 15 December 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 26.

157 Parker to McKenzie, 13 January 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frames 1378-1381.

158 McKenzie to Parker, 11 November 1915, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1354.

159 McKenzie to Parker, 22 November 1911, SAI Papers roll 4, frame 1358.

significant skill. Perhaps as much out of necessity as by thoughtful consideration, McKenzie demonstrated an adept grasp of politics and organizational acumen informed by three principles: ensure harmony and unity within the SAI; work cooperatively with the white establishment; and uphold standards of quality and achievement for Indians.

The McKenzian Approach: Unity and Harmony

Throughout his affiliation with the SAI, McKenzie preached the importance of harmony and unity within the organization, an extremely difficult proposition given tribal factionalism among members. He believed consensus-building important for Society success. Without consensus, infighting and gridlock would compromise organizational capability and effectiveness and threaten the Society's existence. Further, effecting change in federal legislation required that Indians present a strong and united platform to the political establishment, and dissenting voices served only to weaken those efforts. He discussed the challenges to organizational cohesiveness in a 1914 letter to Charles Dagenett, then-SAI Vice President. "Two great weaknesses have been prophesied for the Society. (1) Long ago I was told that Indians could not agree, and could not hold together. (Of course, as you know, I refused to accept the assumption). (2) The second weakness is that of instability to hold to a program and to hold to the same leadership."¹⁶⁰

Accusations at the SAI's 1911 annual conference of Indian Bureau influence in the Society concerned Arthur Parker. Shortly after the conference Parker expressed to McKenzie his disappointment and confusion, noting that, "I am not quite satisfied with the outcome of the Columbus meeting, nor do I yet comprehend the various motives which actuated some of our members. There seemed to have been several elements and

¹⁶⁰ McKenzie to Dagenett, 3 July 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 41.

many conflicting ideas.”¹⁶¹ Sensing Parker’s frustration, McKenzie responded with a detailed letter that provides insight into his strategy for keeping organizational peace. Admitting that “there are very many puzzles and problems to be worked out,” McKenzie believed “the first great object to be emphasized is that of unity and harmony,” and suggested that Parker and other Society leaders “are in the best position to make the appeal.” “The thing to do is to go ahead,” McKenzie asserted, “always working for the better things, but never failing to keep in sympathetic touch with the widest possible number of people.”¹⁶²

Recognizing the importance of mobilizing other Society leaders in pursuit of organizational unity, McKenzie suggested that Parker reach out to Laura Cornelius, SAI Vice President of Education, and persuade her to “throw the emphasis of her efforts upon harmony.” McKenzie believed that Parker and Cornelius together might bring “back into sympathetic relations all those who mistakenly believe that the Association is controlled by the government.” Disappointed at Carlos Montezuma’s resignation over his perception of Bureau control in the Society, and recognizing his significant influence among Indian communities, McKenzie told Parker he would be “very glad indeed if someone could get in touch with Dr. Montezuma and persuade him of the real facts in the case.” He also recommended that Parker reach out to Dr. Charles Eastman, remarking that as “the best

161 Parker to McKenzie, 23 October 1911, SAI papers, roll 4, frame 1345. Several letters between McKenzie and Parker allude to the infighting at the 1911 conference, with the most descriptive including Parker to McKenzie, 8 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1348, and McKenzie to Parker, 10 November 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1351.

162 McKenzie to Parker, 23 October 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1346.

known Indian” in the United States, “his cordial co-operation is a matter of great significance.”¹⁶³

To help alleviate the factionalism and divergent ideology frustrating the Society’s progress, McKenzie suggested to Parker that “sometimes it seems to me that if a few of you, representing diverse views, and therefore of inclusive influence, would agree to advocate a few fundamental principles, you could, by issuing a statement to that effect, draw many into line.” The “few of you” McKenzie referred to included Parker, Montezuma, Eastman, and perhaps Sherman Coolidge, who at the time was SAI President. McKenzie explained to Parker the three principles he had in mind:

First, a statement that unity is the foremost necessity. Second, that in order to secure the cooperation of all, and to avoid all suspicions of personal or other ulterior motives, you agree to include in the constitution of by-laws, a provision that no government official shall be an officer of the Association; and thirdly, that no person and no tribe shall hold the presidency for two years in succession.¹⁶⁴

McKenzie scribbled by hand that a “fourth primary necessity is an iron-clad agreement for free speech,” and suggested to Parker that soliciting the opinion of Dr. Eastman on the whole matter would “be the wisest initial step.” Careful to avoid the appearance of too intentional an intrusion in Society’s affairs, McKenzie encouraged Parker to “do whatever you decide to do upon your own initiative. This you will see is essential to your own protection.”¹⁶⁵

The internal squabbles plaguing the SAI led to an all out crisis by early 1912. Charles Dagenett, who was elected SAI Secretary/Treasurer in late 1911, resigned over

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

suspicion that his employment in the Bureau of Indian Affairs created a conflict of interest with the organization's goals. Rosa B. Laflesche, his administrative secretary, left soon after in protest of Dagenett's resignation. In a letter to Parker shortly after the resignations, McKenzie reiterated the importance of harmony within the organization, noting "I am inclined to feel very strongly that the first object before the Society is unity, cooperation, solidarity." He continued:

If all the character and intelligence behind this movement is to be found exclusively in the Indian race and in only two of that race, there is little hope. ...It is not quite feasible for any one individual to form a hollow square by himself, with a view to attacking any enemy. There always will be criticism of every individual and unless a basis for common action can be found over and above these criticisms, the Society has no chance for existence. I should say that every other concrete object must of necessity be subordinated to this one...and I believe that by steadily holding together, by repressing antagonisms and by exercising charity, success is still easily within reach.¹⁶⁶

McKenzie's desire for organizational unity often collided with his commitment toward inclusion and representation. Although an ardent proponent of free speech within the Society, McKenzie vacillated between encouraging debate and avoiding situations that might lead to contentious discussion. "A diversion of views is necessary," McKenzie wrote Parker as they planned the program for the 1912 annual conference, but later in the same letter he urged Parker to eliminate from the program controversial issues, noting "the grave danger that when particular problems are attacked there are possibilities of harm." He asserted that "not even Indians are agreed on many of these matters and the Society might be split badly over them," and suggested "the Society will do well to consolidate itself and to avoid personalities by discussing problems so general and reaching conclusions so universal that the particular evils will take care of

¹⁶⁶ McKenzie to Parker, 3 January 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1374.

themselves.” If certain controversial topics must be addressed, McKenzie wondered to Parker “if there could be some scheme evolved by which these various topics could be presented either without action upon the part of the Conference or only provisionally, subject to a more careful consideration by a special committee or commission...you might avoid many of the dangers.”¹⁶⁷ He reiterated his point in a letter two weeks later: “I believe that vital discussions are essential to the life of the organization but could wish that nothing be done at the present time to disrupt the organization.”¹⁶⁸ McKenzie’s careful approach sometimes met with success, as Parker noted shortly after the 1913 annual conference in Denver. “I concur heartily with you in your opinion that the Conference was a distinct success. The reasons for its success are obvious, as all dissension was eliminated...”¹⁶⁹

McKenzie’s work toward organizational harmony continued throughout much of his affiliation with the Society. In 1914, the Society presented a memorial to President Woodrow Wilson as part of its lobbying efforts on behalf of the Carter Code Bill and Stephens Bill. In a letter to William Kershaw (Menonimee), an attorney in Milwaukee who was Vice President of the Society, McKenzie offered several recommendations regarding logistics of the memorial presentation and banquet, which were attended by several Indian leaders and White politicians. McKenzie suggested the plans should accommodate the interests of both Indians and the political establishment, and he

¹⁶⁷ McKenzie to Parker, 11 May 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1428.

¹⁶⁸ McKenzie to Parker, 21 May 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1436.

¹⁶⁹ Parker to McKenzie, 27 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 18.

reminded Kershaw, “Harmony on this occasion. Concentration of effort always.”¹⁷⁰

Advising Parker on the 1915 SAI annual conference, he noted the importance of striking a tone of solidarity early in the proceedings, suggesting “if you feel it wise to place me on an early evening program we may be able to turn the attention of the Conference from some minor details to larger matters.”¹⁷¹

Despite his commitment to organizational unity, continued dissension plagued the Society and eventually led McKenzie to reevaluate his approach toward consensus building. In 1916, McKenzie told Thomas Sloan, Society Vice President, that “it is best for us all to stand together a little longer at least,” when advocating for Indian legislation, and that “patchwork will never achieve any results.” However, he hinted at his frustration of appealing to a variety of disparate interests and suggested that strong and intelligent leadership must be given support to further an agenda in the best interest of Indian assimilation:

Sometime, some one person or some commission, who has or that has thought out the Indian problem from the point of view of fundamental principles, must be put into power and given a free hand and hearty support from the Indians and their friends, who know that any administration will make mistakes but that a wise administration will do much good if it can receive strong support from those who appreciate wisdom and can overlook errors of details.¹⁷²

The McKenzian Approach: Soliciting White Cooperation and Support

Fayette McKenzie understood that Indian advancement required support of the White political establishment. In early 1912, he suggested to Arthur Parker the Society pursue two

170 McKenzie to Kershaw, 25 October 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 51.

171 McKenzie to Parker, 3 July 1915, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 63.

172 McKenzie to Sloan, 24 May 1916, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 80.

strategies to “secure the interests of the Indian.” The first concentrated on development of an Indian leadership class, and the second focused on soliciting cooperation of politicians sympathetic with Indian issues. With the government in control of Indian affairs, and “since all control and government is in the long run a matter of the consent of majorities,” McKenzie asserted “it is obvious that the administrative interests must be secured privately by the people of intelligence and conscience in the White race. It seems inevitable that the Society to score along these lines must establish friendly cooperation with non-Indians.”¹⁷³ McKenzie sought to stimulate interest and cooperation with Indian issues within the government using three approaches: lobby influential whites both within and outside the government, increase White membership in the SAI to impress government officials, and ensure SAI public communications – especially with respect to legislation – were consistent and accurate.

Dissension within the SAI troubled McKenzie. The internal rancor created administrative hassles and threatened to derail broader efforts for Indian advancement, as an uncoordinated platform of differing opinions and ideologies provided politicians a convenient excuse for ignoring Indian interests. Communicating a strong and united message to White politicians was crucial to garnering political support, and McKenzie urged the Society to tightly regulate communication channels to ensure consistent and transparent messages with influential Whites. Writing to Parker about lobbying for the Carter Code Bill, McKenzie suggested “that care be taken to unify the campaign.” He recommended to Parker that “one man in Congress (or two men with a mutual understanding) should have the direction of the campaign from this time on, and they

¹⁷³ McKenzie to Parker, 3 January 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1375.

should feel that they know every line of influence being exerted, it is so wonderfully easy to ruffle the feelings of human beings.”¹⁷⁴

The SAI’s platform and rationale for Indian advancement required a messaging approach that Whites found palatable and non-threatening. McKenzie preferred to frame issues of Indian uplift as important to advancing the economic and cultural interests of the United States, a message that underscored Indian capability. Referring to the Carter Bill, McKenzie suggested to Parker that “the tactics of the campaign should be very carefully and very wisely worked out. They ought to be on a broad basis, not upon a purely racial interest, but from the point of view of general intelligence of public conscience.”¹⁷⁵ In a letter to Charles Dagenett several months later, McKenzie stressed the importance of a consistent and uniform message in lobbying for the legislation, and offered a framework of talking points the Society could employ:

It seems to me imperative that the Society should prove its stability by standing unwaveringly for the Carter Code Bill, and for the Stephens Court of Claims Bill. Every modification, even, of these measures, will give opportunity for juggling. Support divided between two or three similar measures will rob any one of them of enough votes to win.... It will count powerfully in their favor if they will go to Congress in the fall and say, we have for three years been waiting for one great measure of relief, and for one year for a second great measure. We have been patient; we have not insisted on precedence over the interests of the nation at large. We have been constant; we urge today the same measure that we urged three years ago. Our [Indians] object is not one of personal advantage or of private aggrandizement. It is a request of fundamental importance for the salvation and development of a race. It is also a request which means large economy ultimately to the nation.”¹⁷⁶

174 McKenzie to Parker, 27 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1370.

175 McKenzie to Parker, 17 December 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 27.

176 McKenzie to Dagenett, 3 July 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 43.

While necessary to advance Society interests, soliciting White support required delicate approaches to avoid arousing Indian fears that Whites controlled Society affairs. Mindful of this danger, McKenzie suggested to Parker that “the campaign for Congressional action should be put upon a very broad basis and should be backed by associates and other white citizens fully as much as by Indians.” McKenzie justified white involvement in the process – and perhaps attempted to ease Parker’s fears about the same –by suggesting that “the Society will get practically all the credit when success comes.”¹⁷⁷

The impetus for more aggressive outreach to the political establishment revolved around the Carter Code and Stephens Court of Claims Bills, which represented the two most important pieces of federal legislation during the early years of the Society. In a letter to John H. Stephens, a Congressman from Texas who served as chairman of the Committee on Indian Affairs from 1911-1917, McKenzie called the bills “two great objects of immense importance to the Indians and to the nation.”¹⁷⁸ He viewed passage of the bills as significant steps toward Indian progress and assimilation, and a significant test of the Society’s strength, efficacy, and future viability. “If those two bills could be credited to the influence of the Society,” he wrote Charles Dagenett, “the Society would have a standing which would mean immense things.”¹⁷⁹

The bills garnered little political traction in Washington, as legislative ignorance on the Indian problem led to political apathy and apprehension to address Indian affairs.

177 McKenzie to Parker, 27 October 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 22.

178 McKenzie to John H. Stephens, 20 December 1913, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 30.

179 McKenzie to Dagenett, 3 July 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 43.

Arthur Parker noted the political aversion to Indian rights legislation when he observed that “one senator wrote me that there was a great deal of prejudice in considering Indian matters and reluctance to take them up.”¹⁸⁰ Still, McKenzie privately lobbied Congressmen and other influential constituencies, mobilized support among Indians, and solicited support of other non-Indian organizations. He thought the chances good for passage of the Carter Code Bill, although he admitted to Parker “that it might add to its chances if the bill could be pushed not only by the Indians but by important non-Indian organizations. The matter is one of real importance to other races as you will readily see.”¹⁸¹

Fayette McKenzie understood perhaps more so than any of his Indian colleagues that to successfully advance an agenda of Indian political and legal rights required two difficult tasks. First, Indian-rights advocates needed to interest influential Whites in their crusade. The Indian’s small population, lack of voting rights, and White indifference to Indian affairs frustrated efforts to stimulate sincere interest among the White business and political establishments. Second, Indian leaders needed to mobilize their own people in collective and unified support for Indian enfranchisement. McKenzie sought to correct inaccurate assumptions among both groups:

There are two fallacies to be guarded against. One is that all non-Indians are unwilling and unable to labor for the interests of the Indians and the other is that all Indians are consistent advocates of genuine Indian rights and capable of appreciating the higher standards. Wholesale condemnation on the one side and indiscriminating praise on the other, are decidedly great dangers in this cause.”¹⁸²

180 Letter from Parker to William J. Kershaw, 12 November 1913, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 530.

181 McKenzie to Parker, 13 December 1911, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1369.

182 McKenzie to Parker, 3 January 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1375.

Despite many Indians' general distrust of Whites and the U.S. government, McKenzie spoke frankly to Indians about the need for understanding among both races and the importance of enlisting White support for the Indian movement:

Just as the white man must believe in the capacity of the Indian, so the Indian must believe in the kindness of the white man. We both must learn to judge a man's ideas, not by the color of his skin, but by the value of his ideas. You expect me to look at this problem primarily in light of the welfare of the Indian...May I not expect you to look at it at least partially in the light of the welfare of the white race?....Are you planning to serve the rest of the world, as you think the rest of the world should serve you? If we of another race are to be truly and wisely kind to you, we must study and struggle to understand you. May we not hope and expect that you will try equally hard to understand us?¹⁸³

McKenzie made clear that Indians must work through the White establishment to further their political agenda. In working with Whites, he called on Indians to:

Discriminate and to give your trust to those who prove to have the deepest knowledge, the wisest plans, the most unselfish motives, and the most genuine sympathy. More than that, because of the great difference in numbers, you will secure public policies to your advantage only as you can interest the white race in those policies. Any attempt to 'go it alone' is doomed to failure. The Indian in the nation is a like a man in society. No man either liveth or dieth to himself. You must let us help you, as we must let you help us.¹⁸⁴

Finally, McKenzie suggested both Whites and Indians share in the responsibility for Indian advancement:

The strong race must remember that responsibility is proportional to power, and the weaker race, as it aspires to power, must remember that duties come when power comes. Each race must remember that rights and duties rise and fall together.... Let us yoke ourselves under a joint restraint in order that we may pull in the same direction and to the same goal, the goal of a new and better civilization.¹⁸⁵

183 Fayette McKenzie, "The Cooperation of the Two Races," 28.

184 Ibid., 32.

185 Ibid.

The McKenzian Approach: Upholding Principles and Standards

McKenzie believed Indian advancement required that standards for Indian achievement match those of Whites. Applying lower educational or employment standards to Indians compromised White respect and retarded Indian development and advancement. In a speech at the 1913 SAI annual conference, McKenzie encouraged Indians to hold to the higher standard, noting that “An Indian should not ask for anything just because he is an Indian.” He encouraged his audience to get the best trained teacher for their children, cautioning them not to “sacrifice the education of your children to give a job to an Indian. Demand highly trained men of broad sympathies in all positions affecting Indians, and you will command respect and get what you want. Demand positions for Indians, and you will lose public respect.”¹⁸⁶ McKenzie thought similarly about political appointees. The Carter Code legislation provided a three-person Commission to study Indian affairs, and McKenzie admitted to Arthur Parker he had been remiss in proposing and vetting a list of candidates for the position because of a desire to “stand by principle and not for creating a public position for friends.” He also confided to Parker that he was somewhat “convinced that it would be a mistake to argue for the appointment of an Indian just because he is an Indian. ...If the Society shall stand for quality and achievement, rather than for race, it will win public approval to a high degree.”¹⁸⁷

Just as he argued for high standards for Indians as a means to engender White respect and facilitate Indian progress, McKenzie believed in placing Society interests above

¹⁸⁶ McKenzie, “The Cooperation of the Two Races,” 29.

¹⁸⁷ McKenzie to Parker, 14 March 1912, SAI Papers, roll 4, frame 1410.

individual agendas. In a letter to Thomas Sloan, an Indian attorney and former officer of the Society, McKenzie applauded his efforts to keep the SAI intact during an especially contentious time. “No issue, no bill, no policy is comparable in importance with a demonstration that Indians can maintain unity and cordial feelings even at times of difference upon specific points,” McKenzie proclaimed. “He who abandons the Society stabs the welfare of the Indian in its most vital point.” McKenzie pointed out that the Society was the greater sum of the individual members, and asserted “every member of the Society is to think for himself. His subordination is to the Society as a whole and to the policies adopted by the Society.”¹⁸⁸

McKenzie vigorously defended the policies and platforms of the SAI, and he encouraged Society leaders not to betray the progress of Indian advancement. “It seems to me that the first thing even now for the Indian Society to do is to stand and to stand without variableness for the ideals and policies so far announced,” McKenzie wrote to Charles Dagenett. To assure Dagenett he stood firmly for those principles, McKenzie recounted a story about a wealthy (White) man interested in Indians, but who was opposed to the existence of the Carlisle School and did not believe in education for Indians outside of industrial training. McKenzie disagreed with the gentleman and told Dagenett, “I would not sell out the Indians, if that were necessary to induce the wealthy man to make a contribution.”¹⁸⁹ Likewise, he admired colleagues who stood firm in the face of criticism, held to their convictions and, if necessary, sacrificed personal reward for the good of the organization and the movement. The dissension among the Society’s membership shortly

188 McKenzie to Thomas A. Sloan, 28 March 1916, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 75.

189 McKenzie to Dagenett, 7 July 1914, SAI Papers, roll 5, frame 45.

after the inaugural conference led him to confide to Parker that certain Society leaders may need to place Society's interests above personal interests and voluntarily resign.

That McKenzie criticized the communal nature of Indian tribes and Indian allegiance to tribal bonds, yet suggested Indians subordinate their individual agendas for the greater good of the SAI demonstrates a hypocritical paternalism evident in many White reformers working on behalf of minority groups in the early 1900s. In an Indian context, McKenzie believed – as did most SAI leaders – that subordination to tribal influence retarded Indian development, as tribal ways reflected primitive forms of culture. McKenzie valued diversity of thought as a process, but in the end expected individual opinions and positions to yield to the organization's desired policies and positions.

Insights into McKenzie's Work with Indians

Fayette McKenzie spent over four decades working for Indian rights and advancement. From his teaching appointment on a remote Indian reservation in Wyoming, to his role in the founding of the Society of American Indians and his significant contributions to government commissions studying Indians, McKenzie amassed impressive achievements toward Indian uplift. His commitment and passion for Indian uplift transcended a purely academic devotion – for McKenzie, Indians were much more than simply interesting people to study. Rather, McKenzie labored with and for Indians, spending much of his career in pursuit of political and legal remedies so Indians might enjoy the rights and responsibilities of American life, as those who displaced them enjoyed its privileges.

McKenzie's belief in legal rights and citizenship for Indians represented a perspective well outside mainstream American opinion in the early 1900s, but he risked little social ostracism. Americans may not have agreed with granting Indians political and legal rights, but they did not perceive Indians as a menace to the White political and economic establishment. The Indian population in 1910 numbered just 265,683, and most Indians resided on reservations far from America's large population centers on the east coast.¹⁹⁰ Many Americans viewed Indians within McKenzie's Darwinian conqueror perspective – a beaten people existing as a sad curiosity of uncivilized life – and their opposition to Indian rights stemmed from Indian's perceived mental and socio-cultural inferiority, not their threat to white hegemony.

From an academic perspective, McKenzie and other assimilationists viewed the Indian problem through a sociological orientation. Just as solutions to problems such as homelessness, public health, and crime required the expertise of sociologists, so too did the problem of Indian enfranchisement. Believing that untrained bureaucrats in Washington were responsible for poorly conceived and/or executed Indian policy, McKenzie argued that the answer lay in applying prevailing sociological and scientific principles to the Indian problem. McKenzie's concept of sociological intervention focused on using political, legal, and administrative instruments to achieve Indian advancement, but entirely absent from consideration were cultural factors important to many Indians. McKenzie saw little, if any, value in traditional Indian tribal society and,

190 The population figures indicate Indians residing in the United States. The Indian population in Alaska numbered 25,331 in 1910. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *Indian Population in the United States and Alaska. 1910*. Government Printing Office: Washington, 1915.

as a result, his prescription for assimilation ignored – indeed sought to eliminate – any vestige of tribal influence.

McKenzie's work with Indians is a study in contrasts. Although he promoted an anti-establishment agenda of Indian political and legal rights, he expected individual Indians to support the "establishment" ideals of the Society of American Indians. He believed in organizational harmony, but often refused to compromise on principles in which he passionately believed. He was a visionary with grand ideas for Indian advancement, but concerned himself with myriad administrative details. He was a sociologist and scientist, but eschewed prevailing scientific models promoting racial superiority of Whites. Despite the incongruities – or perhaps because of them – he "attempted to put into place a coherent system based on modern social science, social work, and Christian idealism a program for 'race transformation' which would encompass Indians at various levels of acculturation and would be implemented by the major forces in the Indian field, including educated Indians." Although he did not achieve immediate success, "his program anticipated many reforms which were to be undertaken decades later."¹⁹¹

Fayette McKenzie's attitudes and work on behalf of Indians must be evaluated in the context of the early 1900s. With the hindsight of nearly a century, his views on Indian assimilation, along with those of his closest Indian colleagues, are painfully paternalistic, and firmly rooted in the context of a White social order. There is no denying that for White and Indian progressives alike, Indian uplift (as defined by Whites, of course) meant advancement on White terms. They perhaps could not conceive of

¹⁹¹ Hertzberg, *The Search for An American Indian Identity*, 35.

Indian advancement on Indian terms, although, to be fair, it is doubtful many Progressive Indians considered such a question. Yet, in the context of the early 1900s, McKenzie's call for Indian citizenship, legal rights and status, and assimilation – even if on White terms – represented a radical intellectual position contrary to mainstream thought.

McKenzie endeavored to eliminate racial distinctions in an effort to achieve equal rights for Indians. Today, erasing ethnic characteristics is considered cultural genocide, but in the early twentieth century many non-whites *chose* to suppress or eliminate their ethnic characteristics in order to become an “American.” What was then viewed as highly desirable is seen today as horrific. McKenzie, as well as many Indians in the Society, believed that absent assimilation the race would become extinct. He sought to save a race through inclusion, not exclusion, and the important ideals for which he labored – equal rights and enfranchisement – should not be blurred by the methods and ideas employed to achieve them. To apply contemporary standards in evaluating McKenzie's beliefs and work is to overlook the significant and progressive role he played in Indian uplift.

The challenges McKenzie faced in his work with Indians and the Society mirror several issues he faced at Fisk University, including organizational unity, racial uplift, and the need to engage White constituencies in his work. Although the issues were much the same, the context of the work – and the population for which he labored – differed considerably, and the strategies McKenzie pursued at Fisk both align and depart from the approaches he advocated and pursued in his work with the Society.

CHAPTER THREE

A COMING TOGETHER: FAYETTE McKENZIE, INDUSTRIAL PHILANTHROPY AND BLACK LIBERAL ARTS HIGHER EDUCATION

The democracy of the new age will not be realized in full unless the Negro be included. Nor will democracy come in full measure to the Negro unless efficient education in large measure be preserved and added unto for him.¹

– Fayette McKenzie

Philanthropic Motives in Negro Higher Education:

The Progressive, New Left, and Revisionist Narratives

Two distinct phases of northern philanthropy influenced development of Black higher education in the South. Funding by Christian missionary organizations immediately following the end of the Civil War gave way to more substantial efforts by northern philanthropic foundations in the early 1900s. Often founded by corporate industrialists, these foundations – including John D. Rockefeller’s General Education Board, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, the Carnegie Foundation, and the John F. Slater Fund – funneled millions of dollars to Black higher education over a span of 50 years.

¹ McKenzie to Dr. Sala, 1 April 1918. Fayette Avery McKenzie Papers, 1915-1926. Fisk University Library Special Collections, Nashville. box 17, folder 6. Hereafter cited as McKenzie Fisk Papers. Dr. Sala was a donor to Fisk University.

While scholars largely agree that benevolence motivated religious philanthropy, they fiercely debate the motivations of industrial philanthropic funding of Black higher education.

Black higher education's first philanthropic phase consisted of northern missionary and religious societies – primarily coordinated through Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist denominations – travelling to the South to found and operate schools for the newly emancipated slaves. Motivated primarily by Christian piety, these “abolitionist egalitarians” sought to educate blacks and help dismantle the repressive racial practices of the South.² Although the missionaries' primary goal focused on teaching Blacks reading, writing, and arithmetic, they also educated them in the image of an ideal American citizen, an effort that acknowledged “Blacks were equal to Whites but for the debilitating effects of slavery.”³ As James D. Anderson noted, the missionaries believed in classical liberal education for Blacks, training that would allow them to move into the mainstream culture, “largely free to do and become what they chose, limited only by their own intrinsic worth and effort.”⁴

Work of the religious societies proved instrumental in establishing and promoting Black higher education in the South from the end of the Civil War to the turn of the twentieth century. In 1866, nearly 96% of the four million ex-slaves were illiterate.

2 J.M. Stephen Peeps, “Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education – Do-Gooders, Compromisers, or Co-Conspirators?” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 50, no. 3 (1981): 254.

3 Jane E. Smith and John B. Williams, “History and Goals and Black Institutions of Higher Learning,” in *Black Colleges in America: Challenge, Development, Survival*, ed. Charles V. Willie and Ronald R. Edmonds (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 91.

4 Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 240.

Missionary idealism dovetailed with a Black population eager to learn but without basic skills, and collided with a White Southern population fiercely opposed to Black education of any kind.⁵ Undaunted, the missionaries taught Blacks basic academic skills, and trained academically promising students as teachers. The strong demand for Black education throughout the South led denominations to establish several schools in the region, and little thought was given to administrative coordination in founding schools within or among congregations. As a result, Black schools proliferated.

When missionary societies experienced financial challenges in the early 1900s, their funding of Black higher education decreased, and by 1910 dissipated almost completely. With their primary source of funding eliminated – and with most lacking government support – Southern Black schools turned toward foundations of northern, and to a lesser extent southern, philanthropic foundations for support. Industrial philanthropy, which in limited ways had supported Black higher education since the late 1800s, suddenly became an important resource for Black institutions. With the establishment of Rockefeller’s General Education Board in 1902, industrial philanthropists embarked upon a more assertive approach – both philosophically and financially – in the shaping of Black higher education, a movement that represents the second phase of northern philanthropy.

Scholars have long been fascinated by industrial philanthropy’s role in Black higher education between 1900-1930, and interpretations for the philanthropists’

⁵ Stephen J. Wright, “The Negro College in America,” *Harvard Educational Review*, 30 (1960), 280-281; Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999), 9-11.

motivations continue to evolve. Roy Finkenbine uses Gene Wise's "explanation form" construct to explain evolving theories of motivation within industrial philosophical narratives.⁶

Through much of the 1960s, both White and Black scholars characterized industrial philanthropy in Black higher education as motivated primarily by benevolence in supporting Black uplift, and/or stimulating awareness of Black educational needs among state and local governments in the South. Painting a somewhat romantic picture of northern industrialists coming to the aid of their Black brethren, Horace Mann Bond admitted that although philanthropic benevolence could perpetuate an accommodationist mentality necessary for Black subordination, he asserted such an outcome was neither intended nor realized by industrial philanthropy. Any fault of the philanthropists, he wrote, was caused more by "an inability to understand the historical process than by a malign desire to corrupt Negroes for the sake of perpetuating a particular variety of social or economic ideas."⁷

Ullin Whitney Leavell contended that industrial philanthropy was not interested in advancing any sort of philosophical agenda – indeed, it "has no control over any of its

⁶ Wise argued that historians do not produce objective inquiry, but develop interpretations through filters which he called "explanation-forms." He suggested that in the twentieth century three dominant explanation forms have been utilized: Progressive, counter-progressive, and New Left. Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations: A Strategy for Grounded Inquiry* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1973). Roy E. Finkenbine, "A Little Circle: White Philanthropists and Black Industrial Education in the Postbellum South" (Phd diss., Bowling Green University, 1982), 36.

⁷ Horace Mann Bond, *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1934), 149-150.

beneficiaries” – but rather sought to promote the development of Black self-reliance and independence.⁸

John Hope Franklin suggested that the motive for northern philanthropists “stemmed from the successful businessman’s sense of noblesse oblige.” He wrote that the philanthropists had a feeling of duty toward those economically disadvantaged by a system that failed to provide directly for their social needs.⁹ Jesse Brundage Sears thought similarly, writing that the dominating motive in educational philanthropy has been to serve society.¹⁰

Historian Louis Harlan suggested that the philanthropists were guided by charity, their efforts intended to cushion Blacks against “the shock of racism.” With noble intentions, they assumed education would help advance Black uplift. Unfortunately, they miscalculated that the Southern elite would join them in their effort to help and protect Blacks.¹¹

C. Vann Woodward, while recognizing the philanthropists’ restraint in advocating for more radical social and economic change, remarked that the “zeal that animated the education crusade in the South was that mixture of paternalism and noblesse oblige.”¹²

8 Ullin Whitney Leavell, *Philanthropy in Negro Education* (Westport, Conn: Negro Universities Press, 1930), 57-58, 80, 167.

9 John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 280-281.

10 Jesse Brundage Sears, *Philanthropy in the History of American Higher Education*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1922).

11 Louis R. Harlan, *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States 1901-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 92.

12 C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 401.

Henry Enck asserted that northern philanthropic motivations were well-meaning, with no ulterior motives behind their support, although he admitted that they “relied too largely on education as an instrument for social change.”¹³

Charles Thompson suggested that although the extent of philanthropic funding made it inevitable that the philanthropists would exercise considerable control within Black education, they were careful not to interfere with the administration of the institutions that received contributions.¹⁴

Near the end of the 1960’s a new explanation form began to emerge, one that largely rejected the prevailing conviction that industrial philanthropic motivation rested on benevolence and charity. The rise of a New Left orientation provided alternative perspectives to evaluate northern philanthropy. According to Finkenbine, New Left scholars saw in northern philanthropy more sinister interests, including a desire to restrain Black uplift, to exploit Black labor for economic gain, and to perpetuate the prevailing racial hierarchy and mechanisms in the South.¹⁵

Perhaps the turn to the New Left explanation form began with Henry Bullock. In his *A History of Negro Education in the South*, Bullock suggested that motives beyond benevolence influenced philanthropic interest in Black higher education. Although Bullock doesn’t entirely disregard benevolent intent as a motivating factor, he asserted that the philanthropists were primarily motivated by an interest in securing their public

13 Henry S. Enck, “The Burden Borne: Northern White Philanthropy and Southern Black Industrial Education, 1900-1915” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1970), 533.

14 Charles H. Thompson, “The Control and Administration of the Negro College” *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 19, no. 8 (April 1946): 487.

15 Finkenbine, “A Little Circle,” 43.

acceptance, and repairing their reputation as instigators of class conflict. With egos damaged by their portrayal in the public press as caring only for wealth, the philanthropists sought to demonstrate their humanitarianism and preserve the dignity of their class. Bullock also suggested the South's vast economic potential attracted philanthropists whose economic interests transcended attention to social conditions. In short, he argued that educational philanthropy allowed philanthropists to "show their humanitarianism," and "regain public acceptance," while "increase(ing) labor value" and "open(ing) greater consumer markets" in the South. Bullock maintained the philanthropists had little interest in race relations in the South, remaining "personally aloof" and not wanting their gifts to disturb the prevailing caste system.¹⁶

Bullock's early transition toward ascribing more selfish and sinister motivations to industrial philanthropy led to the development of more comprehensive and critical narratives from two influential voices, James D. Anderson and Donald Spivey. Anderson's work in particular has served as a prominent foundation for subsequent scholarly inquiry about industrial philanthropy and its role in Southern Black higher education.

Spivey argued that economic self-interest served as the primary motivation for industrial philanthropy. Taking a cue from Bullock, he developed a theory that northern industrialists used education to subordinate and exploit Blacks for industrial labor. The economic utility of a huge Southern Black labor force, Spivey suggested, made it unnecessary to "conjure up an elaborate conspiracy theory to understand why industrial

¹⁶ Henry A. Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 119-120.

education received full support from Northern industrialists who had economic interests in the South.”¹⁷

Anderson expanded Spivey’s framework, marrying racial motivations with economic self-interest as stimuli for industrial philanthropy. Throughout four separate scholarly works, Anderson characterized the philanthropists as “white supremacists,” unconcerned with Southern racism and racial attitudes. Focused on “industrial conquest and dominance” and “economic efficiency and political stability,” the philanthropists used their financial resources to develop and maintain White hegemony in the South. Anderson suggested that philanthropists were more concerned with “the art of managing Negroes” than uplifting them, and viewed Black education as replacing slavery as means for restraining Blacks.¹⁸

Anderson and Spivey’s work provided a broad scholarly base upon which other New Left scholars have built. Historian Stephen Peeps asserted a distinguishing factor of industrial philanthropy in Black education “is its tendency to accommodate the wishes of reemerging white supremacy.”¹⁹ Building on Anderson’s work, Peeps suggested three primary reasons for this accommodation. First, northern industrialists had no other choice than to accommodate the White Southern establishment. Second, their beliefs and philosophies regarding race and the preferred racial order differed little, if any, from that

17 Donald Spivey, *Schooling for the New Slavery: Black Industrial Education 1868-1915* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), 71-91.

18 Anderson, *Education of Blacks in the South*, 92. Anderson, “Northern Philanthropy and the Training of the Black Leadership,” 102. Anderson, “Philanthropic Control Over Private Black Higher Education,” 102. Anderson, “Education as a Vehicle,” 29.

19 Peeps, “Northern Philanthropy,” 256.

of the South, and, third, they saw an opportunity to exploit Black workers and expand their economic interests.²⁰

Martin Carnoy bluntly stated that any humanitarianism in industrial philanthropic efforts “was always secondary to capitalists’ economics needs,” and the capitalists were “more interested in exploiting Southern resources than in promoting Black liberation.” Carnoy argued philanthropists were “already opposed to class or racial equality before they headed South.”²¹

More contemporary scholars continued the tradition of the New Left. William Watkins correctly asserted the volatile issue of race relations was a primary concern to the philanthropists, but suggested they wished to perpetuate “a stable and orderly South, where subservient wage labor and debt farming or sharecropping would provide the livelihood for black Americans.”²² Watkins relied heavily on Andersons’ works to marshal evidence of the philanthropists’ racist and sinister motives, pejoratively calling them the “architects” of Black education.

M. Christopher Brown II, Ronyelle Bertrand Ricard, and Sarah Donahoo contend that industrial philanthropists supported industrial education as a mechanism for social

20 Ibid., 265.

21 Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay Company, 1974), 273, 286, 292.

22 William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (Columbia University: Teachers College Press, 2001), 22-23.

control, and were interested in cultivating Black leaders who would promote and perpetuate an accommodationist philosophy toward race relations.²³

Neither the Progressive nor the New Left explanation-forms are sufficient to facilitate a thorough understanding of the motives and behavior of industrial philanthropy. Finkenbine astutely recognized limitations of the narratives, and characterized the Progressive perspective as reflective of the philanthropists' self-perception (benevolence and noblesse oblige), while the New Left narrative captured philanthropists' desire to control Blacks to advance their racial, economic, and cultural interests.²⁴

Although Finkenbine completed his work in 1982 – a period dominated by New Left scholarship – his valid criticism of the two explanation forms foreshadowed the creation of a new revisionist perspective to explore and evaluate northern industrial philanthropy's role in Black higher education. One of the most important contributions to the revisionist narrative is Eric Anderson and Alfred A Moss, Jr.'s work, *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902-1930*.

Anderson and Moss explored the philosophies, attitudes, and motivations of industrial philanthropists within the complex context of the period, and examined differences between the philanthropists' public statements – often made for Southern audiences – and their private intent and correspondence. They concluded the

23 M. Christopher Brown II, Ronyelle Bertrand Ricard, Sarah Donahoo, The Changing Role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities: Vistas on Dual Missions, Desegregation, and Diversity, in *Black Colleges, New Perspectives on Policy and Practice*, M. Christopher Brown II and Kassie Freeman, Ed. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 10.

24 Finkenbine, "A Little Circle," 48.

philanthropists possessed a vision of race relations dramatically different from the Southern White establishment, and they feared Southern White opposition to their efforts.²⁵ This angst played an important role in their philanthropic efforts, and led to a more gradualist approach – a strategy characterized by scholars Anderson, Carnoy, and Peeps as evidence of an accommodationist, White supremacist orientation. Anderson and Moss argue, however, the philanthropists were committed to reforming the South, and believed “the status quo was not only unjust, but also a deadly threat to the future security and prosperity of the whole nation.”²⁶

According to Raymond Wolters, the South’s intuitive understanding that no aristocracy could maintain privilege with an egalitarian educational system frustrated philanthropic efforts to promote Black education in the South. Wolters asserted that philanthropists understood it was “necessary to work within the framework and traditions of the White South,” seeking to accomplish “what could be done, rather than try to do what should be done.”²⁷

In an examination of the Slater Fund, which was active in Black education in the late 1800s, John E. Fisher remarked that “it was easily perceived [by Slater Fund leaders] that it would be counter-productive for Slater Fund officials to insist upon racial equality for Blacks when they wished to encourage White southerners to take up the task of

²⁵ Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 9-11.

²⁶ Ibid., 41.

²⁷ Wolters, *The New Negro*, 8.

providing educational opportunities for Blacks... This view increasingly became the national view.”²⁸

Raymond Fosdick, a former General Education Board (GEB) member who authored a history of the organization, wrote candidly of the GEB’s approach toward Black higher education in the South: “...the Board was aware from the start of the dangers inherent in a Northern institution working in the highly charged emotional atmosphere of a biracial South.... A single misstep could be disastrous.... Consequently its role was marked with caution and modesty...”²⁹ The GEB’s guarded approach resulted in slow, incremental actions to improve Black education, and Fosdick acknowledged the GEB’s deliberate approach: “That the philosophy of Buttrick [former executive secretary of the GEB] and his contemporaries was based on the idea of gradualism cannot be denied.... Their strategy was strongly pragmatic.”³⁰

Although New Left historians cite Fosdick’s observations as evidence the GEB pursued an accommodationist strategy sympathetic to White Southern racial sentiment, they overlook his anticipation of their criticism.³¹ “To accuse the General Education

28 John E. Fisher, *The John F. Slater Fund: A Nineteenth Century Affirmative Action for Negro Education* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1986), 115.

29 Raymond B. Fosdick, *An Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 320.

30 Ibid., 323.

31 Marybeth Gasman calls Fosdick’s statements an “apology.” Gasman, “A Renaissance in Nashville,” 25. Stephen Peeps pejoratively terms Fosdick’s statements “the accommodationists’ defense.” Peeps, “Northern Philanthropy and the Emergence of Black Higher Education,” 265.

Board of some sort of conspiracy with the White supremacist movement,” Fosdick proclaimed, “...is a misuse of historical analysis.”³²

The revisionist perspective most accurately characterizes the true intent of industrial philanthropy in Black higher education, and recognizes the highly complex and significant challenges philanthropists faced in promoting Black higher education throughout the South in the early twentieth century.

Black Higher Education: Industrial vs. Liberal Arts

Important to an examination of Black higher education and industrial philanthropy from the late 1800s through the 1920s is an understanding of the fierce debate between proponents of industrial education, which taught manual skills appropriate for homemaking, agriculture, and industrial production, and those favoring classical liberal arts education to prepare Blacks for professional roles in society. In his position as Principal of Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington, the most articulate spokesman for industrial education, demonstrated a successful industrial that several other institutions throughout the South replicated. Washington believed that Black uplift depended on self-support and industrial independence and, therefore, Black education should focus on practical skills and knowledge in agriculture, home arts, and other trades. Washington argued that by finding jobs and ensuring their economic self-sufficiency, Blacks would earn Whites’ respect and help improve race relations. Although any form of Black education often came under vigorous (and sometimes violent) attack from Southern Whites, industrial education – training that addressed Blacks’ desire for learning and at the same time kept them in roles subservient to Whites – was for the most

³² Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 324.

part tolerated in the South.³³ Impressed by Washington and his success, the nation's corporate and political elite – including Andrew Carnegie, Julius Rosenwald, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., and several U.S. Presidents – visited Tuskegee to learn more about industrial education and see first-hand its operation.

Washington exerted considerable influence over industrial philanthropists and their foundation executives. As the most prominent spokesman for Black education in the South, Washington had long faced the same dilemma that confronted the philanthropists: how to promote Black education and uplift without alienating white Southerners, many of whom vehemently opposed any form of Black advancement. Most contemporary historians accuse Washington of accommodating white supremacist ideology, but his strategy was highly pragmatic given conditions in the South, and led one Black scholar to assert that far from accommodating Whites, Washington “...masterfully manipulated Blacks and Whites alike...”³⁴ Washington believed that education for Blacks would gradually move toward more liberal training, but that a strong foundation of industrial education helped address the immediate needs of the race and slowly sensitized Whites to the need for Black educational opportunities. Proponents of industrial education understood that “the black could expect toleration as reward for hand labor, persecution and resentment for evidence of mental capacity.”³⁵

33 Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 56. Richardson noted the acceptance of industrial education in the South was due primarily to the general attitude that Blacks were mentally inferior to Whites, and White desires to keep Blacks in positions of manual labor.

34 David H. Jackson, Jr., *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 183.

35 Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 56.

Washington's pragmatic and gradualist agenda resonated with industrial philanthropists, who found in the industrial model a method to promote Black education without encountering significant Southern opposition. Washington formed close relationships with several philanthropists and their executives – many considered him their tutor in matters regarding Black education – and they routinely sought his advice on any important decision regarding Black education in the South. Washington leveraged his considerable influence with the philanthropists to steer funds toward industrial education, and most specifically Tuskegee, which served as the model to which other institutions were compared, regardless of academic orientation. Commenting on his visit to Fisk in 1917, Julius Rosenwald, then chief executive of Sears, Roebuck, & Co., and through his Rosenwald Fund a generous benefactor to black education, complained that among Fisk students, “there seemed to be an air of superiority of them...rather than the spirit which has always impressed me so at Tuskegee.”³⁶

W.E.B. DuBois, who completed his undergraduate degree at Fisk in 1888, harshly criticized the industrial education model, and advanced the merits of a liberal arts philosophy that would provide Blacks with opportunities to achieve intellectual, social, and political equality.³⁷ He believed industrial education further promulgated Black inferiority and White supremacy, and asserted Blacks would never achieve equal rights if they settled for education that prepared them largely for occupational roles subservient to Whites. DuBois based his argument for classical education around the need for Black leadership, or a talented tenth of Black leaders who could provide the intellectual and

36 Rosenwald to Abraham Flexner, 15 January 1917. GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1273.

37 Smith and Williams, “History and Goals and Black Institutions of Higher Learning.”

professional leadership for the race. These future leaders required education that transcended simple vocational training. DuBois' belief in Black capability and the need for Black liberal arts higher education to develop Black leaders raised questions even among northern Whites. Mr. Charles Jackson, a prominent financier from Boston, expressed a common northern liberal viewpoint when he observed to L. Hollingsworth Wood that "the relatively small number of Negroes who need a college education might be accommodated in the better known northern institutions."³⁸

Despite DuBois's protestations, and due largely to Washington's considerable influence, industrial philanthropic support of Black higher education in the South between 1900-1915 disproportionately funded industrial institutions, with Hampton Institute and Tuskegee the chief beneficiaries. So great was funding for these two institutions that in 1915 their combined endowments represented over 51% of the *total* endowments for all Black colleges in the United States.³⁹ Although a handful of philanthropists recognized a need for some limited form of Black classical higher education, they were uncertain if they should, and if so how, organize philanthropic effort in such a direction.

Industrial Philanthropic Views on Race and Race Relations

New Left historians, including James D. Anderson, Donald Spivey, Lester Lamon, Martin Carnoy, and William Watkins, suggest that industrial philanthropists

38 Letter from Wood to Wallace Buttrick, 9 June 1922, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1275. Wood solicited Jackson's interest in becoming a trustee at Fisk, and Wood recounted to Buttrick his conversation with him.

39 Sherman J. Jones and George B. Weathersby, "Financing the Black College," in ed. Charles V. Willie and Ronald R. Edmonds, *Black Colleges in America: Challenge, Development, Survival*. (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978), 111.

served as co-conspirators with Southern Whites to repress Black uplift and maintain White racist hegemony in the South. The New Left's interpretation largely rests on public remarks from philanthropists that suggest sympathy with White supremacist ideology. In 1899, William H. Baldwin Jr., who three years later would be the General Education Board's first chairman, proclaimed that, "Except in the rarest of instances, I am bitterly opposed to the so-called higher education of the Negroes."⁴⁰ That same year, Baldwin told delegates at a prominent conference on education in the South that:

The potential economic value of the Negro population properly educated is infinite and incalculable. In the Negro is the opportunity of the South. Time has proven that he is best fitted to perform the heavy labor in the Southern States. ... Properly directed he is the best possible laborer to meet the climatic conditions of the South. He will willingly fill the more menial positions, and do the heavy work, at less wages, than the American white man or any foreign race which has yet come to our shores. This will permit the southern white laborer to perform the more expert labor, and to leave the fields, the mines, and the simpler trades for the Negro."⁴¹

At the first Capon Springs conference in 1898, J.L.M. Curry, a graduate of Harvard Law School, former Alabama congressman, and Lieutenant Colonel in the Confederate Army, proclaimed that "The white people are to be the leaders, to take the

40 Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 247. Watkins, *The White Architects*, 158. Fosdick, *Adventures in Giving*, 342. Anderson and Moss note that Fosdick incorrectly gives the source of the comment as the Southern Workman, August 1899. Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 68.

41 Cited in Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 82. Watkins, *The White Architects*, 156-157. The conference, known as the Capon Springs Conference for Education in the South, was a gathering of industrial philanthropists, Southern businessmen, and educators that took place annually in the South from 1898 to 1914. Anderson claims that after three annual conferences, northern and southern participants "recognized that they shared beliefs in universal education, white supremacy, and black industrial training." Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 84.

initiative, to have the directive control in all matters pertaining to civilization, and the highest interests of our beloved land.”⁴²

Dr. Wallace Buttrick, a former Baptist minister who served as the GEB’s Secretary under Baldwin and later became chairman of the organization, observed at a Conference of County Superintendents in Nashville in 1903 that, “I recognize the fact that the Negro is an inferior race, and that the Anglo-Saxon is the superior race.”⁴³ Later that year at another meeting of county superintendents, this time in New Orleans, Buttrick proclaimed that “The Negro, if he is to be educated at all, is to be educated by the people of the South and in the way they may prescribe. We, as a General Education Board, have no suggestions to offer.”⁴⁴

In a speech on Black Education in 1900, Robert C. Ogden, a prominent businessman and later in his life one of the country’s leading proponents for Black education in the South, remarked that “our great problem is to attach the Negro to the soil and prevent his exodus from the country to the city.” Ogden also spoke of Blacks’ “childish characteristics,” and suggested they were thriftless, careless, shiftless, and idle by disposition.”⁴⁵

42 Cited in Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 84.

43 Proceedings of Tennessee School Superintendents’ Conference, Nashville, 8-9 April, 1903, Box 209 GEB Papers. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 92. Watkins, *The White Architects*, 126. Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 52. Buttrick spent nearly 25 years at the GEB, serving as secretary (1902-1917), president (1917-1923), and chairman (1923-1926). He also served as a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1917 until his death in 1926.

44 Transcript of Conference of County Superintendents, New Orleans, 25-27 November 1903, Box 209, GEB Papers. Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 51.

45 Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 89. Watkins, *The White Architects*, 143. Ogden was well-known for an annual train trip he organized throughout the South so interested northerners could see firsthand Black education in practice, as well as the need to expand it. Many prominent northerners,

A closer examination of the philanthropists' public and private communication suggests an alternative interpretation to the standard New Left narrative that asserts philanthropic sympathies with Southern White supremacy. While most New Left historians take at face value the philanthropists' public pronouncements and ignore the context of the remarks, Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss convincingly argue that the environmental context framed and informed philanthropists' statements. Far from conveying their personal beliefs – which often contradicted their public remarks – and tailored for Southern audiences and media consumption, the philanthropists' messages sought to reassure Southern Whites that their views on race relations largely mirrored those of the South, while pledging to allow the South to manage its educational affairs. Acutely aware that angering the South could derail efforts in promoting Black education, the philanthropists proceeded cautiously, and masked their true educational and social intent under a rhetorical cloak that expressed solidarity with Southern white interests. Atticus G. Haygood, an agent for the Slater Fund, characterized both the pace and challenge of promoting Black education in the South: “My work seems so slow, but there is no other way. This work must take root in the South - & in Southern white conscious – Else, some day, it will die.”⁴⁶

The philanthropists carefully crafted their rhetoric for Southern audiences for several reasons. First, remarks more consistent with prevailing Southern sensibilities about race helped calm Southern fears about an educated Black population, which

including John D. Rockefeller, Jr., became intimately familiar with Southern Black education through Ogden's trips.

⁴⁶ Haygood to Rutherford B. Hayes, 5 February 1885 and 12 January, 1887. Cited in Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 40.

paradoxically facilitated philanthropic efforts to promote Black education. Second, public rhetoric more aligned with Southern concerns blunted assertions in the Southern press that Northern philanthropists sought to change the status quo in Southern race relations. In 1902 the *Richmond Times* wrote that, “There is suspicion among some of the Southern people that these Northern philanthropists are endeavoring to elevate the Negro and bring him into a closer social relationship with the Southern people.” The *Charleston News and Courier* took issue with a Booker T. Washington remark that praised industrial philanthropy for its efforts on behalf of Black education, suggesting, “His statement that ‘the movement which is fathered and guided by the General and Southern Education Boards has already gone far in laying the foundation for helpful service to both races’ would appear to justify much of the criticism with which this movement has been received in the South.”⁴⁷ Finally, philanthropic rhetoric sought to assure the South they controlled their education system for both Whites and Blacks, and industrial philanthropy would play no role in broad educational matters in the South.

Evidence suggests the philanthropists’ public pronouncements differed markedly with their personal intent, and their private correspondence often harshly criticizes Southern attitudes and practices regarding race relations. Anderson and Moss assert that most northern philanthropists considered Southern views on race relations perverse, which led them to develop a “hidden agenda” that “would result in the ultimate subversion” of white supremacist practice in Southern race relations.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Cited in Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 52.

⁴⁸ Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 49.

In a private memorandum detailing a trip to visit Southern Black schools in 1919, James H. Dillard, President of the Slater Fund, characterized the tense racial atmosphere in the South. "Wherever we went, we sought also to ascertain local feelings to the existing relations between the white and colored races. Our experience strengthened us in the conviction that it is hardly possible to overemphasize the importance of dealing constructively with the Southern situation." Dillard noted that he observed increasing friendliness between "the better elements" of both races, but "between the lower strata of both races...it would seem that the tension has in recent years distinctly increased." The philanthropists considered education the best strategy to reform race relations in the South, and Dillard believed the "sole hope of removing irritation to which the uneducated of both races are thus liable would seem to be in the education of both races."⁴⁹

The philanthropist most outspoken in his private attacks on Southern attitudes was Robert C. Ogden. In a letter to William Baldwin, Ogden declared, "The South is insane upon the Negro question. Not one Southern man in ten thousand approaches correct views." He wrote to a friend that, "The South is not yet through with the effort to re-enslave the Negro," and remarked to another associate that, "It is extremely stupid on the part of the Southern people that they fail to perceive the injury they are inflicting upon themselves by surrendering their entire section of the country to crazy prejudice." Charles W. Dabney, one of Ogden's close friends and the former president of the University of Tennessee, encapsulated philanthropists' views of the South when he noted the "almost

49 James H. Dillard and George R. Hovey, memorandum dated October, 1919. GEB Papers, box 306, folder 3194.

insurmountable prejudice, narrowness, sectarianism, sectionalism, demagoguism [sic], and profound stupidity of the leaders of these people and of the masses of the people themselves.” Ogden lamented the slow and cautious approach to Black education, but understood the necessary pragmatism of working deliberately within the South, observing that, “we cannot meet the views of our colored friends and must be content to be greatly misunderstood for the sake of the largest usefulness.”⁵⁰

The behavior of George Foster Peabody reflected the careful approach philanthropists took in keeping hidden from public view their personal convictions. After writing a friend that whites in the South “as a rule can be carried only so far and we cannot afford to let the present generation of the south control negro education without definite cooperation with those of us who believe in the negro as a man and child of God,” he instructed the executive secretary: “...do not leave on your desk at the office because I do not want to distress any Southerner who might not readily understand it.”⁵¹

William Baldwin, who famously remarked that he was “opposed to the so-called higher education of the Negroes” befriended Booker T. Washington in 1899 and soon after began aggressively advocating for Black rights. Speaking about escalating race hatred in response to growing Black progress, Baldwin told a friend, “Do not for a moment doubt that the friction is due largely to jealousy and to fear of the ignorant white people that the Negro will get on top.” In 1903, Baldwin told Wallace Buttrick that if the “Southern States separately cannot see the value of justice for the negro as well as

50 Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 41, 50-53.

51 Peabody to Ida Mason, 26 March 1912, Peabody to Rev. S.H. Bishop, 26 March 1912, cited in Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 53.

education,” the federal government should take over black education in the South.

Unlike other philanthropists, Baldwin refused to placate Southern attitudes. In a speech to businessmen in Richmond, Virginia in 1903, Baldwin boldly asserted, “You have never doubted the advisability of giving your children a...education – are not such doubts always about the children of others?”⁵²

Private correspondence among philanthropists provides compelling evidence that their public remarks to Southern audiences masked their personal feelings and the strategies they employed in funding and advancing Black education in the South.

Industrial Philanthropy’s Strategy for Black Higher Education

Southern sentiment opposing Black education failed to lessen industrial philanthropic zeal – rather, it likely strengthened it – but Southern attitudes did significantly influence the process, type, and growth of Black education throughout the South. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Black education largely meant primary and secondary education. Most Blacks lacked any formal education, and the most acute needs focused on basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Blacks aspiring for advanced training often enrolled in industrial colleges, such as Tuskegee or Hampton, where they could learn the latest techniques of agriculture, or develop skills for a trade.

Philanthropic support of industrial education muted to some extent the hostile attitude of some Southerners toward Black education, but it did not eliminate it. At a conference on Southern education in Richmond, Virginia, North Carolina newspaper editor Josephus Daniels attempted to capture the tenor of Southern feeling regarding Black education by declaring that most of the money supporting such education was

⁵² Quotes cited in Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 63,75.

“given against the judgment of Southern taxpayers,” and “tens of thousands [of whites]...do not believe in it [Negro education] at all, and who are frank to say that, in their judgment, it does nobody good.”⁵³ Southerners with a slightly more liberal outlook accommodated education that prepared Blacks for subservient roles in the South rather than classical education that trained Blacks for professional positions. Although many philanthropists believed Black higher education should include a liberal arts alternative, they rationalized that some education was better than none at all, and industrial education largely avoided alienating influential White Southerners.

Although most industrial philanthropists considered the South’s position on race relations morally wrong and dangerous to the stability of the nation, they struggled at crafting appropriate policies and strategies for Black education. As a result, their efforts risked misinterpretation among both Black educators and Southern Whites.

Several factors contributed to the philanthropists’ uncertainty. First, and perhaps most important, the philanthropists’ policies required Southern acceptance, if not their support. Without Southern toleration, efforts at Black education would go nowhere and further retard further socioeconomic progress of Blacks, the South, and the nation.

Second, the philanthropists sought to stimulate Southern responsibility for tax-supported, public education for Blacks. They hoped initially focusing on industrial education would provide the South an opportunity to witness the advantages of a more educated Black population, and lead the South to take greater responsibility for establishing public education for Blacks. Yet, such a strategy worried philanthropists on

⁵³ *Proceedings of the Conference for Education in the South, The Sixth Session*, (New York: General Education Board’s Committee on Publication, 1903), 143-145.

at least two levels. First, they wondered if the scope of their efforts in funding Black education – limited though it was – might create in the South a disincentive or complacency among the States to provide public educational opportunities for Blacks. Second, insufficient or decreased funding threatened to send a negative message to the Black institutions and communities impacted by the cutbacks. Jackson Davis, a field director for the General Education Board, summarized the latter dilemma in a letter to GEB Secretary E.C. Sage, when he suggested that eliminating funding for some schools “would have an unfortunate effect upon the attitude of these schools and denominations toward white people in general.”⁵⁴ Finally, philanthropists debated to what extent their funding of Black higher education should promote industrial or liberal arts models. An expanding Black population created demand for professional occupations the large Black industrial schools could not meet, but the curricula at many Black colleges barely exceeded a secondary level.

The philanthropists faced a vexing situation. Pursuing too aggressive an agenda risked angering and alienating the South, which compromised Southern interest in creating a tax-supported educational system for Blacks. Conversely, a slow and cautious approach might lead to accusations among Blacks the philanthropists cared more about Southern White opinion than Black advancement. Although most philanthropists favored a gradual approach, the lack of a coherent policy on the issue created uncertainty over how best to manage and direct philanthropic support.

In early 1914 many of these issues came to the fore as the result of a meeting between John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Jerome Greene, special assistant to Rockefeller, Jr., and

⁵⁴ Davis to Sage, 18 May 1920, GEB Papers, box 306, folder 3194.

Oswald Garrison Villard, who at the time was an influential journalist and White chairman of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Villard argued the General Education Board, the most important foundation in Black education, needed a greater sense of urgency toward, and an increased presence in Black education. In a letter to Wallace Buttrick, then-Chairman of the GEB, relating details of his conversation with Rockefeller, Jr. and Villard, Greene mentioned his discomfort with the GEB pursuing too broad a presence in Black education. He raised the commonly shared belief among GEB executives that “the danger that by keeping alive, largely by Northern money, a large number of inferior negro schools, we might be hindering the Southern communities from regarding negro education as their own responsibility.”⁵⁵ Three days later, Greene reiterated his point, suggesting that “if the net effect of anything done by the GEB was to promote inferior private schools as an alternative to increasing the number and improving the quality of schools supported by taxation, that would be very unfortunate.”⁵⁶

Villard argued that although the GEB’s work was “very encouraging” it did not “affect the growing need of the schools of higher education which are turning out the teachers of the country today.” He told Rockefeller, Jr. that if the GEB could not help financially, it should support in other ways the Black school principals of the Association of Negro Rural and Industrial schools, including “co-ordinating their work...standardizing the curriculum, weeding out the incompetents, putting the money

55 Greene to Wallace Buttrick, 7 January 1914. GEB Papers, box 353, folder 3651. At the time of the letter, Buttrick was Chairman of the GEB.

56 Greene to Buttrick, 10 January 1914, GEB Papers, box 353, folder 3651.

raising on a scientific bases, etc.” Villard believed GEB interest in the principals’ organization “would help the GEB with the colored people, who have the impression that it is indifferent to their needs.”⁵⁷ Villard’s persistence and persuasiveness led Rockefeller, Jr. to write Buttrick that with respect to Black higher education, “I have felt for sometime that possibly the Board was not performing its full duty to the negroes and that we should consider the situation fully and seriously.”⁵⁸

Buttrick’s response to Rockefeller reflected the uncertainty and cautious approach that characterized GEB strategy toward Black higher education. Admitting the “slow progress of the work,” Buttrick anticipated a forthcoming study of Black schools in the South by Thomas Jesse Jones “should throw light on this whole question” of Black education. Buttrick “had long believed” in the development of two or three “strong institutions of higher learning for the Negroes” as well as “two, or possibly three, of the medical schools for Negroes,” but he lamented the “Christian denominations have each founded several such schools, nearly all of them poorly equipped and meanly supported.” Buttrick suggested that if the congregations concentrated their efforts on a limited number of schools, it would be easier for “our Board to select from the entire number of schools which we might aid in developing.”⁵⁹ Buttrick’s response to Rockefeller demonstrated the extent to which specific funding decisions for the GEB – and most other large foundations, with the notable exception of the Julius Rosenwald Fund – were controlled by foundation executives and managers, not the philanthropists themselves.

57 Villard to Rockefeller, Jr., 26 January 1914, GEB Papers, box 353, folder 3651.

58 Rockefeller to Buttrick, 2 February 1914, GEB Papers, box 353, folder 3651.

59 Buttrick to Rockefeller, 5 February 1914, GEB Papers, box 353, folder 3651.

The foundation bureaucrats largely determined how and where to deploy resources, and in so doing often exerted greater influence on Black higher education than the industrialists for whom they worked.

Rockefeller Jr.'s desire to explore more fully the GEB's role in Black education pushed GEB executives to clarify its strategy and address growing frustration and rhetoric among Black school administrators and White liberals, and led the GEB to convene a conference on Negro education in November 1915. With the notable exception of Booker T. Washington, who had died three weeks earlier, several prominent philanthropic voices in Southern Black education attended the conference, including representatives from the Jeanes Foundation, Phelps-Stokes Fund, and the Slater Fund. Representatives from the leading Black colleges also attended, including Morehouse College, Hampton Institute, and Tuskegee. Fayette McKenzie represented Fisk University. Conspicuously absent at the table were representatives from the missionary organizations that had largely supported Black education in the South through the early 1900s, and federal and state educational authorities. Washington's death, and with it the end of his counsel and influence among philanthropists, not to mention his support of industrial education, underscored the conference's importance in helping chart future philanthropic strategy for Black higher education in the South.

Through the conference the GEB sought to "develop a general program of principles and policies that will guide in determining the specific things to be done in each state" for Black education. The agenda outlined five questions for discussion, the first three of which focused on how the GEB could work with public school officials to

develop state school systems for Blacks, and in what ways, if any, the GEB should work with Black organizations, religious congregations, and other private philanthropic organizations to organize and supervise private, secondary, and industrial schools. The fourth inquiry probed how the two most prominent Black institutions, Tuskegee and Hampton, could contribute to developing Black education in the South (primarily through the training of teachers). The last question focused on higher education, and specifically what “is sound policy in respect to the number, scope, support and development of higher academic institutions for negroes?”⁶⁰

Abraham Flexner, assistant secretary of the GEB, moderated the discussion. Flexner, a champion of the progressive education movement, had recently gained prominence for authoring a Carnegie Foundation report on medical education in the United States. Leading up to the discussion on Black higher education, the attendees generally reaffirmed the GEB’s position that philanthropic assistance for Black primary and secondary education should stimulate Southern states to provide tax supported public education for all children. “The only way of really maintaining the public school systems in any state is by taxation,” Flexner proclaimed to the group. “Anything else is a temporary makeshift”⁶¹

With general agreement about the necessity of public funding for Black education, the group debated the role of private Black schools in primary and secondary

60 Document titled “Outline of Discussion at Proposed Conference on Negro Education.” October 1915, GEB Papers, series 1.2, box 353, folder 3651.

61 Minutes of Conference of the General Education Board of the Rockefeller Foundation on Negro Education. GEB Papers, series 7, room 106, unit 8, shelf 6, box 14, 184. Hereafter referred to as Conference on Negro Education.

education. Flexner worried that “public school development” might “be retarded or injured if these private schools are made more permanent.” He later wondered if “these privately supported schools will tend to become too large, and to cover too much ground; be too expensive to maintain to warrant the public school authorities in taking them over?”⁶² Flexner believed, as did other GEB executives, that when public education began to flourish, private schools would largely disappear. Flexner’s remarks suggest he increasingly believed that accelerating private schools’ demise by withholding further financial assistance might stimulate more quickly state provisions for public education.

Unlike primary and secondary private schools, the group agreed on the importance of private Black colleges, and they debated the role of industrial institutions including Hampton and Tuskegee, and the Black liberal arts colleges. After a long discussion on the declining strength of Hampton graduates, Flexner asked “is it that Hampton is not doing as well as it once was, or that the situation has so improved that something more is needed now that was not needed fifteen years ago?” Major Robert Russa Moton, an administrator at Hampton who would shortly replace Booker T. Washington as principal at Tuskegee, believed the situation had improved, and that Hampton should provide greater opportunities to train Black leaders.⁶³ Moton’s characterization of Black improvement, however, referred less to Blacks’ advancing social standing in the South than to the relative improvement of conditions in Black communities, a circumstance partly the result of an increasing Black population.

⁶² Conference on Negro Education, 56-57, 61.

⁶³ Ibid., 118.

Dr. Bruce Payne, a former GEB staffer and then-President of the George Peabody College for Teachers, articulated a fundamental issue the group faced when he stated, “We have the complaint we have not enough [black] leaders. You cannot get the men for this school that one and that one. That is the burden of the complaint here today. It seems to me the perfections of the machinery for turning out Negro leaders in education is the biggest thing there is, and you will never get away from it.” John Hope, the Black President of Morehouse, agreed and asserted that, “we do need downright broad Negro leadership.”⁶⁴ Segregation in the South separated Blacks from whites in many social and business interactions, but it could not and did not suppress the growing need for Black leaders.

Despite acute needs for Black leadership, many private Black colleges were chronically underfunded, enforced weak academic standards, and in many cases were colleges in name only. With several private Black colleges in the South – a consequence of the missionary societies’ uncoordinated approach to founding schools – and only a few of which that could legitimately develop Black leaders, Flexner posed the question:

...what would be the effect of selecting four or five Negro colleges and building them up, making them good, honest, sincere, effective colleges so far as they went, and letting the others along, not to suppress them or consolidate them but just to make them ‘sweat,’ would that tend in the long run to so stigmatize the inferior institutions that they would give up, the way the poor medical institutions are giving up?⁶⁵

Flexner’s leading question reflected the GEB’s prevailing approach toward Black education: a selective (instead of broad-based) funding strategy, and a cautious, wait-

⁶⁴ Ibid., 118, 154.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 161-162.

and-see approach to evaluate impact of the strategy. Although Flexner's query was more an indication of his belief in such an approach than an honest effort to solicit feedback, his idea impressed James H. Dillard, President of the Jeanes Foundation, who declared that "...I believe if the GEB as part of its policy would wisely select a half dozen or more, maybe, of these that are now the best – I am talking about the colleges and so called universities – that it would solve the question."⁶⁶ John Hope, however, questioned the wisdom of allowing Black colleges to close. "When we realize how big a population we are going to have...it is a serious question in my mind whether we ought to think about getting rid of those schools." Hope asserted the desire for education was so strong among Blacks that if missionary schools closed, "the Negroes would say, 'We are going to educate our children in our own schools.,' and they would start another college, and we would be worse off than we are now.If we should do away with Morehouse College and Spellman Seminary....the Negro Baptists of Georgia would start a Baptist College of their own."⁶⁷

As a newcomer to Black higher education, Fayette McKenzie primarily listened to the dialogue and offered little input. However, he did suggest the importance of having Black colleges engage with their external environments, declaring that as administrators of Black colleges "we also want to make our work fit into the life of the community and the life of the communities where the students are to go." McKenzie argued doing so required "a partial reconstruction of the curriculum as to the subjects" and content within the subjects, and that all of these things, "go back, in large degree, to the fact of support."

⁶⁶ Ibid., 161-162, 186.

⁶⁷ Conference on Negro Education, 150-60. Anderson and Moss, *Dangerous Donations*, 92-93.

Voicing sentiments he would repeat to Fisk trustees during his administration, McKenzie told the group that “if presidents are obliged to spend all their time in the North getting money, they do not have very much time to visit the classes and to improve the quality.”⁶⁸

Historians Eric Anderson and Alfred Moss argue that the GEB’s Conference on Negro Education produced few, if any, tangible results in philanthropic activity for Black education. Indeed, a report issued by the GEB’s Committee on Negro Education, which consisted of Flexner, E.C. Sage, Wicliffe Rose, and Hollis B. Frissel in January 1916, reaffirmed its cautious and slow approach. That the conference did not produce groundbreaking changes in the GEB’s policy for Black education should not diminish the subtle but important shifts in thinking toward Black liberal arts higher education. The meeting provided an important theoretical foundation for funding Black liberal arts universities, as participants universally acknowledged the need to more aggressively develop Black leaders. Although Flexner’s proposal for funding five or six Black colleges never materialized, the GEB slowly began more intentional funding for one liberal arts college – Fisk University – in an experiment to determine the efficacy of supporting Black liberal arts colleges. Beginning in 1916, the GEB directed more significant support, financial and otherwise, toward Fisk.⁶⁹ As Sherman Jones and George Weathersby suggest, the GEB began to understand that Black liberal arts

⁶⁸ Conference on Negro Education, 176.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 161-162. The GEB continued to generously fund select industrial-oriented institutions, including Tuskegee and Hampton.

institutions would “form a nucleus” of colleges and universities for Blacks, and that some financial assistance needed to be directed toward them.⁷⁰

To varying degrees all of these issues with which the GEB grappled existed prior to Booker T. Washington’s death. His passing in 1915 – and with him his passionate advocacy for industrial education and substantial influence among industrial philanthropists – portended an upheaval in Black education, social conditions, and Black thought. As conditions changed, industrial philanthropy began a slow but gradual shift from funding industrial schools to helping liberal arts institutions. The GEB’s increasing engagement with Fisk University represents the leading edge of this important shift.

Fayette McKenzie’s Writings on Black Education

Relative to his extensive writings on Indians, McKenzie wrote little about Blacks, perhaps because he lacked broad experience with Black conditions and problems prior to his appointment at Fisk. Although his duties as President precluded much scholarly output, in 1922 McKenzie published an article on Black education in the *The Missionary Review of the World*, a publication targeted to a largely northern and devoutly Christian audience. The article provides a limited glimpse into McKenzie’s thinking on Black higher education.

Perhaps reflecting the influence of his association with industrial philanthropists, McKenzie suggested that both the North and South must remain committed to Black education. He asserted “a great responsibility still remains with the whole country for the improvement of Negro education, and for the support of many significant educational

⁷⁰ Jones and Weathersby, “Financing the Black College,” 112-113. Marybeth Gasman characterizes Fisk as a “nucleus for northern philanthropy” from its beginnings through the 1940s. Gasman, “A Renaissance in Nashville,” 44.

institutions” which, he predicted, would “languish and decay” without Northern assistance. He recognized “more clearly than ever before that the great bulk of elementary education must be done, can be done, and will be done by the several States and innumerable local communities,” but admitted to “the tremendous work which still remains undone” in black education.⁷¹

McKenzie worried the growing prominence of standardized testing in K-12 education would reinforce common White attitudes regarding Black mental incapacity. He anticipated that poor testing performance among Black children “may increase the doubts of many people concerning the higher intellectual phases of Negro education.” Believing that Black capacity for education equaled that of Whites, McKenzie suggested poor test scores should highlight issues of inadequate schooling for Black children, not Black capability: “It is not improbable that inefficiency in our educational schemes will so affect the results under these tests that the ratings will seem to indicate a native incapacity where they ought to be interpreted as indicating educational inefficiency.”⁷²

To correct “educational inefficiency” in Black education, McKenzie urged an emphasis on “plain, old-fashioned principles.” First, Black education “must be made universal” and every Black child be granted a seat in school just as any White child. School attendance must be “compulsory by law and enforced by authority.” Second, Black educational facilities, including buildings, equipment, and teachers must be

71 Fayette McKenzie, “Practical Ideals for Negro Education.” *The Missionary Review of the World*, Vol. XXXV, 1922, 457-464.

72 Ibid.

adequate for the task of educating students at a high level. Last, McKenzie argued for “equal educational opportunity for the Negro child,” and “that there be no philosophy that would grant that a lesser opportunity is sufficient for the Negro.” In an attempt to extend this concept beyond education, McKenzie asserted, as he did on behalf of Indians, that “it is the business of the state and of society to bring to full realization all of the capacities inherent in citizenship.”⁷³

In addition to these basic tenants, McKenzie offered three additional principles “which are fundamental to the educational salvation of the Negro.” First, he proposed a new appreciation of thoroughness in education in the form of improved teaching methods and more accurate grading standards. “The result of inefficient teaching and of over-grading is to give the appearance of incapacity, both individual and racial,” McKenzie declared, and works to “discredit Negro students when they apply for admission to northern colleges.” McKenzie claimed the lack of thoroughness perpetuated White belief of Black inferiority. “The race has been undervalued because it has been subjected to sub-standardization. So far as we have the power to give and to require standard work, and give it not, we not only rob the individual student but we rob the whole race.”⁷⁴

Second, McKenzie noted the tendency for “mutual deception between the races,” which partly resulted from a lack of honesty in applying educational standards. He claimed a philosophy of “good enough” for Blacks led northern colleges to pass Black students for work that would not be acceptable from a White student, and to recommend Black candidates for admission based on lower standards than that of White candidates.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

“Everywhere educational principles tend to be obscured by the mists of deception which hang between the two races,” McKenzie declared, and such circumstances will only be eliminated when “a universal standard for all sections and all races” is adopted.⁷⁵

The third principle stressed adaptation to one’s human environment, and reflected McKenzie’s training and experience in social work. He argued “it should be a part of the function of every school, white or colored, to help the children there towards the kindest and wisest relationships with the children of the other race in that community.” He suggested that the three principles have at their root the concept of character, and urged their adoption in churches and schools to impact the public mind and student performance.⁷⁶

In the final section of the article, McKenzie called on missionary bodies not to entirely abandon Black education, but to redirect their efforts. He boldly suggested that “elementary work be abandoned by the private school” so the States can assume their responsibility for public education, and missionary bodies can consolidate and refocus their resources to fund other levels of Black education. Not unlike his idea of establishing junior colleges for Indian higher education, McKenzie suggested Black institutions that have a handful of senior college students focus on offering only two years of college level work, and send their students to established four year colleges for completion of their degree.⁷⁷

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

Although Southern readers might have gasped at the suggestion, McKenzie asserted “there no longer exists a reasonable doubt of the necessity of college training for a part of the Negro population.” He suggested Black higher education needed to refocus its priorities from establishing new colleges, to securing “efficiency in the schools” that already exist. McKenzie asserted that responsibility for funding Black higher education must come primarily from the North, although he rightly recognized that “the problem of Negro education is not a southern problem; it is not a northern problem; it is a national problem.” Denomination bodies must work together so “the highest good of a splendid race is assured,” and “to insure the highest standards and the fullest opportunities for personal development for all our groups, and particularly for that group which the North and South in history have deprived of its just rights.”⁷⁸

McKenzie’s article reflected many of the principles he implemented early in his Presidency at Fisk, including raising standards, improving facilities, and providing outreach to the community. Most noteworthy, however, is the progressive and assertive tone in his calls for educational equality, implementation of standards regardless of race, and universal education. McKenzie advocated for Black equality in an educational context, and hinted at it in other contexts. Given that many in the South and Nashville would vehemently disagree with his conclusions, and awareness of the article could complicate his relationships and jeopardize other efforts at Fisk, McKenzie’s decision to publish the article seems curious. Perhaps he longed to liberate his views on Black education after suppressing them since the time he arrived at Fisk, or perhaps he anticipated his suggestions might win financial support for Fisk among Northern

⁷⁸ Ibid.

religious conservatives sympathetic with Black struggles. The narrow focus of the periodical and its relatively limited readership likely eased McKenzie's fears about negative fallout among Southern constituencies. Regardless of the reason, many of the recommendations McKenzie offered for Black education are consistent with suggestions he made years before about Indian education, and the similarities suggest an authentic and unvarnished appraisal of his feelings regarding Black education and uplift.

Discussing race relations in the South in the early 1900s required careful observance to Southern social norms, and mindful use of vocabulary. Progressive Southern Whites believed the solution to the race problem existed through *cooperation* and *conciliation* among the two races, which for many Whites simply meant continuation of the current environment of segregation – or, in other words, Blacks and Whites will cooperate to ensure the status-quo. As President of Fisk, McKenzie's public rhetoric needed to balance Fisk's progressive approach to education with generally accepted parameters of racial dialogue within Southern culture. McKenzie's 1923 report to Fisk's board of trustees, which was published in the *Fisk News*, demonstrated his careful approach. "It may be that there is an 'irrepressible conflict' between those who believe in conciliation and co-operation and those who believe that such conciliation and co-operation are undesirable and dangerous," McKenzie proclaimed. "If so, Fisk has taken its stand, and confidently awaits its 'Blessed are ye' which shall mark the end of the conflict."⁷⁹

79 McKenzie to Dr. Sala, 1 April 1918. McKenzie Papers, Fisk University Special Collections, box 17, folder 6. McKenzie, Annual Report to Fisk Board of Trustees, *Fisk News*. 13, no. 4 (January, 1923), 7. Fisk University Special Collections.

Careful to avoid stating his private opinions in public, McKenzie took greater liberty in private correspondence. His remark to a Northern Fisk donor that “democracy in the United States will not be realized until the Negro is included,” would have caused an uproar in the South, as the comment suggested black political, legal, and educational enfranchisement – in short, racial equality. J.G. Merrill, President of Fisk from 1902-1908, expressed well the importance of restraint in communicating personal views on race that might offend Southern sensibilities when he remarked “I trust that I do not lack the courage to expose my views, but so long as I know that Fisk is doing an uncalculable amount of good, I do not think it wise to jeopardize the existence of my work by an unnecessary exploitation of my private opinion.”⁸⁰

McKenzie understood the delicate and often impossible task of appeasing equally Fisk’s trustees and philanthropists, Nashville Whites, and a Black constituency of students, alumni, and faculty. “In a large sense Fisk is the only college standing definitely before the public, both white and colored, for the spirit of conciliation and co-operation,” he declared, “and daring to breast the criticism of the critical Negro, the critical Southern white, and the critical Northern white, and looking to the day when the wisdom as well as success will justify this course.”⁸¹ Perhaps in an effort to appease Fisk’s constituencies, and reflective of the time he spent reflecting on a solution to the race problem, McKenzie founded in the early 1920s an organization called the Triangle of Peace that pledged to work toward cooperative strategies to improve race relations. Visually represented by a triangle, with the base representing the Black man, and the two

80 Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 70.

81 Ibid., 77.

sides represented by the Northern White man and the Southern White man, McKenzie considered the three groups “the essential factors in the solution of the race problem,” and encouraged those who agreed with the idea “to register as members of the Triangle of Peace.”⁸² The pictorial representation of the triangle appeared in the *Fisk News*, as well as McKenzie’s *Ideals of Negro Education*, published in *The Missionary Review of the World*. The Triangle of Peace was more symbolic than an effective mobilizing force for progressive thinkers, but its creation reflected McKenzie’s idea that achieving racial harmony would only be achieved by authentic cooperation among the three groups.

Industrial Philanthropy at Fisk University: Pre-McKenzie

From its founding in 1866 through the end of the nineteenth century, Fisk University secured the majority of its operational funding from the American Missionary Association (AMA). Like many of the religious societies working in Black education in South in the late 1800s, the AMA eschewed vocational models of education, and instead favored a liberal arts approach that provided Blacks a range of skills necessary for professional occupations. As the industrial education movement swept throughout the South, schools committed to the liberal arts found it nearly impossible to obtain money from industrial philanthropists unless they first obtained Booker T. Washington’s blessing.⁸³

Beginning in 1885, a succession of Fisk Presidents solicited assistance from industrial philanthropies, with nearly every appeal unanswered. On rare occasions Fisk’s

⁸² Fayette McKenzie, “The Triangle of Peace.” Undated pamphlet that reprinted McKenzie’s article of the same title² from the *Fisk University News*, March, 1923. Fiskiana Collection, Fisk University.

⁸³ Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 58.

funding requests received approval for modest amounts, and almost always toward activities or programs industrial in nature. In 1884 President Erastus Cravath accepted \$900 from the Slater Fund to train girls in household duties and to teach printing.

Shortly after taking office in 1902, Fisk President James G. Merrill aggressively pursued funding from northern philanthropies, and the General Education Board topped his list. Merrill briefed Wallace Buttrick in late 1902 on Fisk's financial needs, and pointed out that in 1898 the American Missionary Association decided to slowly reduce annual appropriations for the University, which would eventually make "Fisk an independent institution." Over the next several years, Merrill repeatedly solicited the GEB for funding, although it wasn't until 1908 that the GEB made its first contribution to Fisk.⁸⁴

In 1903, Merrill solicited the Slater Fund and contacted personally every Slater trustee north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Merrill requested funds to enhance Fisk's teacher training program, one of Fisk's strongest offerings, and he pointed out many of the instructors as Tuskegee and Hampton were Fisk graduates. The Slater Fund, sympathetic to industrial education, deliberated for two years on Merrill's proposal before granting Fisk \$5,000. The funds were awarded not for teacher training, however, but rather to create a department of applied sciences. Merrill accepted the funding and created a department that in his estimation so "correlated with the existing institution as to maintain its 'unalterable' purpose to be a school of higher learning."⁸⁵

84 Merrill to Buttrick, 13 December 1902. GEB Papers, series 1.1., box 137, folder 1270.

85 Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 61.

The prominence of industrial education in the South reflected Booker T.

Washington's endorsement of the model and his considerable influence on industrial philanthropists. Industrial education's popularity among White educators and philanthropists – along with national notoriety enjoyed by Hampton and Tuskegee as leading centers of industrial education – led United States President Theodore Roosevelt, in his annual message to Congress in 1906, to remark: “Of course the best type of education for the colored man, taken as a whole, is such education as is conferred in schools like Hampton and Tuskegee.”⁸⁶ Washington's monopolistic-like success in directing money to industrial institutions led Fisk President George A. Gates to comment in 1910 that Hampton and Tuskegee had “cornered” New York funders for black education in the South. So pervasive was Washington's influence on Black education and industrial philanthropists that W.E.B. DuBois was known to sarcastically comment that Tuskegee was the capital of the Black nation.⁸⁷

With widespread popularity of industrial education, Fisk's efforts to attract funding from industrial philanthropy achieved little success. The socioeconomic status of Fisk's student body, many of whom came from poor backgrounds and could barely fund their attendance, compounded the University's deteriorating financial situation. Tuition and board rates remained low so Fisk might attract as many students as possible, and many students worked on campus to help fund their education. Financial assistance from the American Missionary Association continued to decline in the early 1900s and exacerbated the need to find alternative sources of revenue.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Fisk's financial difficulties led to the resignation of President Merrill in 1908.

According to Fisk historian Joe Richardson, Merrill had no desire to leave, but was “plagued by the enemy of all Fisk presidents, lack of money.” “The only real difficulty is the money side,” Merrill informed the trustees, “and this difficulty is so great that I have come to the conclusion that I have no longer a right to continue in my present position.”⁸⁸

With the broad acceptance of industrial education, and the corresponding difficulty in raising money for a Black liberal arts college, Fisk administrators concluded that working more closely with Booker T. Washington could prove advantageous for Fisk. In late 1909, Fisk trustees extended an invitation to Washington to join Fisk's board, ostensibly in an attempt to use his influence to steer philanthropic funds toward the University. Washington was familiar with Fisk, having visited the University on several occasions, and several Fisk alumni taught at Tuskegee. Further, Washington's spouse, Margaret, graduated from Fisk and strongly supported the University. In 1908, and due in large part to Mrs. Washington, for whom he had great admiration, Andrew Carnegie gave \$20,000 to Fisk for construction of a new library. At the suggestion of Mr. Washington, Secretary of War William Howard Taft – just six months prior to being elected to President of the United States – agreed to lay the library's cornerstone and speak at the ceremony dedicating the new library.⁸⁹

Washington accepted the trustees' invitation. Although some Fisk alumni thought otherwise, Washington's appointment did not signal Fisk's movement toward an industrial curriculum. Since its founding, the school had rejected most vocational

⁸⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 63, 67.

coursework, although some was offered from time to time as long as it did not impede upon the liberal arts curriculum. Vocational courses were added as an *extracurricular* activity beginning in the 1880s, as it was believed such training would prepare students for the practical duties of life. In 1898, the few industrial courses were eliminated because of lack of funds. They were reinstituted in 1902 when Mrs. James G. Merrill, spouse of Fisk's President, taught domestic science courses *pro bono*.⁹⁰

With Washington's arrival to the board, in 1910 President George A. Gates initiated a capital campaign to raise \$300,000. In June 1911, the General Education Board pledged \$60,000 if Fisk could raise the remaining \$240,000 by October 1912. Even with Washington's considerable support and influence, raising funds proved difficult. The campaign suffered a significant setback in February 1912 when President Gates, en route to meet with Fisk trustees in New York, suffered serious injuries in a train accident in Pennsylvania. Although he returned to Fisk shortly after the accident, his condition deteriorated quickly, and he took a leave of absence in late spring. Showing little improvement, he resigned that summer, and died shortly thereafter. Without a president and facing acute financial challenges, Fisk's trustees considered a merger with Atlanta University, a plan voted down twice by the Atlanta trustees.

Despite the difficult circumstances, and assisted by a campaign extension granted by the GEB, the trustees eventually secured generous commitments from Andrew Carnegie, Julius Rosenwald, J.P. Morgan, and Charles Hull, and in June 1913 successfully completed the campaign. Even with the significant infusion of funds, Fisk still faced severe financial problems, including debt of \$50,000, and another \$50,000

⁹⁰ Ibid., 60.

needed immediately to install steam heat, lighting, and a laundry plant.⁹¹

Nonetheless, raising \$300,000 represented a significant achievement for Fisk, both for the amount collected and the willingness of industrial philanthropy to fund Black liberal arts higher education.

In November 1915, Fayette McKenzie became President of Fisk University, and less than one month later Booker T. Washington passed away. With Fisk desperately in need of resources to fund basic operating expenses, and absent Washington's influence to help direct funds to Fisk, McKenzie solicited the General Education Board just a few weeks after he took office, complaining about University's deplorable physical condition: "Our present toilet facilities are intolerable, and bathing facilities are completely lacking." He mentioned that a lack of funds precluded Fisk from enforcing its textbook teachings in home sanitation and law enforcement, and pleaded for funding to address the deficiencies.⁹²

The General Education Board's Influence at Fisk

With successful completion of Fisk's capital campaign in 1913, industrial philanthropic involvement at Fisk began to move beyond simple financial appropriations. Despite its financial challenges, Fisk's growth and success reflected the potential and promise of all levels of Black education in the South, and the GEB slowly strengthened its involvement with the University, considering their assistance an experiment in funding Black liberal arts higher education. If its support failed to generate interest and results in Black liberal arts higher education, the GEB could allocate resources to other forms of

⁹¹ Ibid., 67-69.

⁹² McKenzie to General Education Board., 1 March 1915, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272.

Black education without regret. Conversely, if its assistance led to the positive outcomes for which the Board hoped, the experiment promised to reshape the GEB's approach toward Black higher education. Working with a small subset of Fisk's board of trustees, nearly all of whom were prominent businessmen in New York City and Boston, the GEB's influence moved beyond financial appropriations and into administrative affairs of the University including, perhaps most prominently, the selection of Fisk's chief executive.

After President Merrill's resignation in 1908, a committee of three long-time Fisk employees co-led the University: Professor Warren G. Waterman, who served as Fisk's finance chief, Dean Cornelius W. Morrow, and the University Registrar. Paul D. Cravath, chairman of the board of trustees, a prominent New York attorney, and son of Erastus Cravath, Fisk's first president, solicited Wallace Buttrick's input for appointing Professor Waterman as acting President. "I am by no means satisfied that Professor W is the man to lead Fisk if the broader plan which we have discussed can be carried out," Cravath declared.⁹³ Unfortunately, Cravath did not elaborate on the "broader plan" he mentioned, but it clearly involved greater GEB funding to help solidify the University as a premier Black liberal arts college in the United States.

A letter George Gates sent to Wallace Buttrick shortly after his inauguration as Fisk President in late 1909 illustrates the GEB's growing role in Fisk's future:

As you know, I undertook the presidency of Fisk University after consultation with yourself and other leaders in the educational movement in the South, in the hope that there would be a strong movement to make Fisk University the

⁹³ Cravath to Buttrick, 26 April 1909, GEB Papers, Series 1.1, Box 137, Folder 1270.

preeminent institution in the South of the higher education of negroes especially with the view to train teachers, lawyers, doctors, and clergyman.⁹⁴

Shortly after Gates' arrival, the GEB appropriated \$5,000 to Fisk to cover expenses for the 1909-10 school year. In a letter to Buttrick thanking the GEB for the donation, Cravath remarked that "I hope before long to have a talk with you with a view to getting your advice as the best way of initiating a larger movement for the support of Fisk."⁹⁵ Between 1908 and 1910, Cravath repeatedly wrote Buttrick seeking his advice regarding matters at Fisk. Cravath certainly recognized Buttrick's expertise in Black higher education and valued his input, but soliciting Buttrick's council also represented an astute political maneuver. Cravath recognized the importance of GEB resources to the long term welfare of Fisk, and he knew his relationship with Buttrick served as an important conduit through which the GEB could provide discreet input about affairs of the institution.

When President Gates' resigned in 1913, a national search commenced to select his replacement. Although some Fisk alumni and the *Nashville Banner*, the city's Black newspaper, argued that a Black man should replace Gates, Booker T. Washington, a Fisk trustee and perhaps the most important voice in the Presidential search process, believed the time was not right for a Black Fisk president. Instead, the trustees, in consultation with Buttrick, turned to Thomas Jesse Jones, who for seven years worked as a professor of social science at Hampton, and after a brief stint as a statistician at the Bureau of the Census, joined the newly created Phelps-Stokes Fund in 1912 as its educational director,

94 Gates to Buttrick, 17 January 1910, GEB Papers, Series 1.1, Box 137, Folder 1271.

95 Cravath to Buttrick, 4 February 1909, GEB Papers, Series 1.1, Box 137, Folder 1271.

a position he would hold for over three decades. While at Hampton, Jones became a prolific researcher and writer on Black education, during which time he befriended Booker T. Washington. With a growing reputation as an expert in Black education and good relationships with Washington and industrial philanthropists, Jones was a logical choice for Fisk President. Despite his unique qualifications for the position, Jones quickly turned down the opportunity, feeling he could do more for Black education in his role with the Phelps-Stokes Fund than he could at a single institution.

With Jones no longer interested, responsibility for finding a suitable candidate fell largely to Booker T. Washington, and for good reason. Any serious candidate for the position required the blessing of Washington, Fisk's board of trustees, and the General Education Board. As the philanthropists respected and accepted Washington's advice in most matters concerning Black education, and Washington's success in bringing resources to Fisk gave him significant influence with the trustees, any candidate acceptable to Washington would likely meet approval with the other stakeholders.

John Cutler Shedd, a professor of physics at Olivet College in Michigan, soon became the leading candidate for the position. Prior to visiting Fisk for the first time, Shedd travelled to New York City in March 1914 to meet with a variety of Fisk stakeholders, including the Carnegie Foundation, officers of the American Missionary Association, academics from Cornell University (all of whom were friends with Booker T. Washington), and Wallace Buttrick. Shortly thereafter, Shedd and his wife visited Fisk's campus, and then proceeded to Tuskegee to meet with Washington. Perhaps

owing to the importance placed on Washington's evaluation of his candidacy, Shedd's four day visit to Tuskegee lasted as long as his stay in Nashville.⁹⁶

Shedd left a favorable impression on both Mr. and Mrs. Washington, and Booker noted that his wife favored the selection of Shedd as Fisk President, feeling that during the few days Shedd was at Fisk "he was able to master the real conditions both in the college and in Nashville."⁹⁷ Although Washington felt Shedd represented "...the best man we can get for the presidency of Fisk University," he raised to Cravath important considerations to the appointment:

First, he will not have an easy task. There is a large and I fear growing element on the grounds and perhaps in the city, against Dr. Shedd. Before going there he would have to make up his mind that it is going to take two or three years to bring this element into sympathy with him and this would require patient, hard work. He ought not to go there with the idea that if he cannot harmonize matters within a few months he would leave.⁹⁸

Second, Washington suggested the trustees must "make up their minds" to support Dr. Shedd through an anticipated "somewhat stormy period" as he acclimated himself and his family to the unique conditions of the South. Finally, Dr. Shedd "ought to be cautioned not to be too ready with opinions concerning either Fisk or Southern

96 The representatives Shedd met from Cornell included ex-President Andrew D. White and Professors Ernest Merritt and Edward L. Nichols. It's unclear their relationship with Fisk apart from being friends of Washington. Shedd commented that "All of these gentlemen expressed the highest confidence in the work of Dr. Booker T. Washington and of anything which would receive Dr. Washington's approval." Perhaps not surprisingly, the men seemed to resonate more with Washington's industrial approach toward Black higher education than Fisk's liberal arts focus. White expressed a muted appreciation for Fisk, saying it should develop the intellectual life of Negroes "in so far as they can find use for it." Shedd noted that all the men felt "that it would be sometime before the product of Fisk – considered as a real college or university – could claim equality with that of our best institutions for whites." J.C. Shedd, Report of Fisk University, accompanied with a letter to Wallace Buttrick, 4 November 1914, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 137, folder 1237.

97 *The Booker T. Washington Papers, Vol. 13, 1914-1915*. Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, Eds. (Chicago and Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 44. Hereafter cited as BTW Papers.

98 Ibid.

conditions.” Washington observed most Northerners “make the mistake of expressing opinions before they have had time to get into the local atmosphere of the community, or of the South.” Although Washington framed his concerns in the context of Shedd’s candidacy, they nonetheless applied to any candidate considered for Fisk’s presidency.⁹⁹

Shedd recorded observations of his visits to Nashville and Tuskegee in a ten page report he sent to Wallace Buttrick in November 1914, after he removed his name from consideration for the position. An astute observer, Shedd provided a unique and unvarnished glimpse into the challenging social environment in which Fisk operated, and he alluded to some of the circumstances about which Washington expressed concern:

...the work of Fisk University was begun and has been carried on in an atmosphere of social ostracism and isolation, and while the white man in Tennessee is as liberal toward his black fellow-citizens as any where in the South, still this liberal spirit has yet amounted to very little – in fact, I am inclined to believe that the colored members of this faculty have a far more normal life than do their white colleagues. While I cannot say the sense of social isolation, which has compelled all the children of the faculty to be sent north for an education, and in some cases has compelled the wives of the professors to live in the North for the sake of the children...has affected the efficiency of the work of the faculty, still this condition must be recorded and deeply regretted.¹⁰⁰

While visiting Fisk, Shedd met with Tennessee Governor Ben W. Hooper. The short meeting raised further disturbing questions in Shedd’s mind, as the Governor expressed doubt “as to whether Fisk could really do for the colored man what Vanderbilt

99 BTW Papers, 32. The “large...and growing element...against Dr. Shedd” referred to blacks in Nashville who believed Fisk should have a black President, and who wanted greater influence in administration of the University. Letter from Booker T. Washington to George Edmund Haynes, 27 June 1914, BTW Papers, 70.

100 J.C. Shedd, Report of Fisk University.

was and is doing for the white” and “doubt as to whether for some time to come financial support could be gained in the South for the institution.”¹⁰¹

Interestingly, Shedd’s interactions with leading White citizens of Nashville were “most cordial.” Shedd noted several enthusiastic statements of support, including “the white members of your faculty will and should be increasingly received in the social circles of Nashville,” and that Fisk graduates “have proved themselves worthy men and women, and in no way have they manifested a bumptious spirit.” Further, there seemed to be interest – likely either disingenuous or with ulterior intent – in serving the University. “Representative men will give hearty cooperation and be glad to serve on the Board of Trustees, should that be desirable,” said one. “White Southern men can be found who will take positions on the Fisk faculty if it be so desirable,” proclaimed another. One observer even contradicted Governor Hooper’s assessment of fundraising potential within Nashville, declaring that “Financial support can be secured in the city for the institution.”¹⁰²

Shedd’s observations of Tuskegee provide additional insight into the situation at Fisk, as he was careful to offer only those perceptions “which have a bearing on the Fisk problem.” Shedd marveled at the campus environment, noting the “entire absence at Tuskegee of any feeling of constraint or repression in the social atmosphere such as...existing at Nashville.” He felt the “spirit of optimism and of achievement” more

101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

dominant at Tuskegee, perhaps owing to the “lack of normality” he found in the environment at Fisk.¹⁰³

While at Tuskegee, Shedd met and spoke with Robert E. Park, the prominent sociologist who was a close companion and advisor to Booker T. Washington, and who at the time was working with Washington studying race relations in the South. Although he did not disclose much of the content of his conversation with Park, Shedd did relate two of Park’s observations that he considered critical for the future of Fisk. According to Shedd, Park felt that the “fundamental basis for race discrimination, which is part of the Fisk problem, lies in the acceptance by it and for it of lower standards,” or, in other words, that “the white, and from him, the colored man has accepted lower standards for the colored man than for the white man.” Shedd agreed with Park that the remedy for the problem “is the adoption of the same standard of excellence for the work performed by the colored schools of whatever sort, and particularly the colleges, as are applied to the corresponding white schools.”¹⁰⁴

According to Shedd, Park felt that the South was ready to cooperate with the North in development of Fisk University as a first rate institution, but that Fisk’s academic standards must be “thorough, fundamental, and without any limit whatsoever. ...Fisk University has a right to aspire, and right to expect, to become a Johns Hopkins, or a Harvard, emphasis being placed upon quality...” That Shedd chose to share with Buttrick recollections of his conversation with Park *after* he removed his name from consideration suggests he felt strongly that the Fisk trustees select a President committed

103 Ibid.

104 Ibid.

to creating – and the philanthropists fund as necessary – an environment that promoted and demanded the highest scholarship. Shedd believed, as Park did, that the basis for racial discrimination would slowly erode by creating similar standards of excellence for Whites and Blacks.¹⁰⁵

Shedd concluded his report by declaring that “one of the aims of Fisk must be to prepare its graduates for pursuing higher studies in various branches in the best institutions of the country. The standards to be applied and lived up to should, therefore, be severe and exacting.” Achieving such a goal required enhancing the curriculum “in such a way as to raise the scholastic standard to the level of the best collegiate institutions of the country.” It also required that Fisk’s annual financial burdens “be placed beyond the necessity of anxiety.”¹⁰⁶

Shedd did not disclose specific reasons for removing his name from consideration, but his lengthy report suggests possible factors. First, he felt uncomfortable with the social isolation of the University, and the circumstances it manifested among faculty, staff, and their families. Second, he believed in elevating Fisk to the top tier of universities in the United States, and he recognized doing so required significant financial resources and strong support of Nashville and the broader South. His observations suggest an uncertainty whether both requirements could be met. Although he admitted being “enthused” by the opportunities to advance Black education, he was also “rather staggered with its difficulties and responsibilities.” In the end, Shedd

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

lacked the passion and fortitude required to lead a Black liberal arts college in the South.¹⁰⁷

John Shedd's candidacy proved a blessing for Fisk's trustees and the GEB. His thorough due diligence and thoughtful analysis of Fisk's situation provided an important third-party perspective on the challenges facing the University. If anything, Shedd's strong and unqualified endorsement of Fisk's pursuit of higher collegiate standards – coupled with Robert Park's similar feelings – reinforced for the philanthropists that Fisk's commitment to the liberal arts made sense. His observations also provided Buttrick and the trustees a clearer sense of the skills and competencies required in a Fisk president. His assessment of the challenging social environment at Fisk, the need for enforcing “severe and exacting” academic standards, and the importance of engaging Nashville in the work of Fisk provided a useful guide to evaluate future candidates. That Fayette McKenzie's experience, skills, and educational background fit well with the competencies outlined by Shedd's report suggests the philanthropists and trustees carefully considered Shedd's observations.

Little evidence exists detailing Fisk's courting of Fayette McKenzie. Thomas Jesse Jones, the GEB's initial candidate for the position who preferred to continue his work with the Phelps-Stokes Fund, likely suggested McKenzie to the trustees. Like McKenzie, Jones was a sociologist, and while working at Hampton Institute, he authored the *Hampton Social Studies*, a series of five lessons packaged as a curriculum for Black primary schools. The final lesson in the series – The Progress of the Indians – presented

107 Ibid.

information regarding Indian population, income, literacy rate, health issues, and reservation life. Jones probably contacted McKenzie as he prepared his lessons on Indians around 1906, and McKenzie was likely familiar with Jones' writings in Hampton's journal, the *Southern Workman*. Not surprisingly, Jones became an early associate member of the Society of American Indians, a role to which McKenzie likely recruited him.¹⁰⁸

McKenzie possessed many of the characteristics mentioned by Shedd as important in Fisk's next chief executive, and other aspects of McKenzie's background likely impressed the trustees and philanthropists. McKenzie's experience living and teaching on a remote Indian reservation, and his extensive work for Indian rights in the Society of American Indians, sensitized him to racism and adverse social conditions not unlike those experienced by Blacks. The social ostracism that dominated Fisk's campus and so disturbed Shedd was not unfamiliar to McKenzie, and he likely felt more comfortable working and navigating within – and attempting to slowly influence – the Nashville social milieu.

McKenzie's substantial experience in socioeconomic uplift for Indians certainly provided a compelling parallel for the task of promoting Black advancement through higher education. Although significant differences existed between the two racial groups, much of the theoretical basis underlying Indian advocacy applied to the Black situation. Fundamental tenants of McKenzie's framework for Indian advancement included the

108 A letter from Arthur Parker soliciting Jones' feedback suggests assistance Jones provided the Society. Parker asked "whether or not you have any suggestions or ideas to advance concerning the welfare of our Society," and requested Jones' help with lobbying for the Carter Code Bill, noting "I should like to have you use your influence to rush it." Parker to Jones, 15 February 1913, SAI Papers, role 4, frame 353.

importance of education (especially higher education), and maintenance of high standards for Indian achievement in educational, professional, personal, and social pursuits. McKenzie's strong Christian character and corresponding commitment to discipline fit nicely with Fisk's history and mission, as well as the strongly Christian orientation of Nashville and the South. McKenzie also possessed significant experience in forging relationships with White constituencies to promote minority advancement. Finally, McKenzie's extensive experience in social work and the recreation and settlement house movements likely appealed to the trustees and philanthropists, as Fisk's new President needed to develop connections and strengthen existing relationships with Nashville's Black and White communities.

In mid-February 1915, McKenzie and some Fisk trustees travelled to Tuskegee to visit with Booker T. Washington and obtain his approval for McKenzie's candidacy.¹⁰⁹ Shortly after the trip to Tuskegee – and his securing Washington's blessing – McKenzie accepted the position as President of Fisk University, which he started almost immediately. In McKenzie, the trustees selected a President that fit many of the characteristics Shedd suggested to Buttrick. McKenzie's strong belief in liberal arts education, steadfast commitment to high standards, attention to strict discipline, and desire to engage with the Nashville community resonated with the trustees and philanthropists.

In general, McKenzie's vision for Fisk aligned with that of the Fisk trustees and philanthropists, although in some cases McKenzie's personal philosophy was more progressive. Similar to J.C. Shedd, McKenzie harbored greater visions for Fisk than

109 Booker T. Washington letter to Seth Low, 16 February 1915, BTW Papers.

many of the trustees and philanthropists, whose interest focused primarily on Fisk's success as a Black liberal arts university. McKenzie possessed grander dreams, envisioning Fisk as a premier university not just within Black education, but within American higher education. As Shedd noted, achieving great things for Fisk required vast resources, and industrial philanthropy represented the funding necessary to achieve McKenzie's dreams for the University. Both the lack and pursuit of money profoundly impacted McKenzie's administration at Fisk, and while he understood the task of raising funds came with the Presidency, McKenzie underestimated the sacrifices – personally, professionally, and morally – required to obtain the necessary resources to bring Fisk the academic prominence he desired.

The General Education Board and McKenzie's Administration

Fisk University's pursuit of industrial philanthropy predated by several years McKenzie's arrival in Nashville – indeed, President J.G. Merrill met with Wallace Buttrick shortly after the GEB's creation in 1902 to discuss funding opportunities, and Merrill aggressively pursued other industrial philanthropies. Although philanthropic support came slowly, the GEB's significant commitment toward Fisk's \$300,000 capital campaign in 1910 marked the beginning of greater philanthropic interest in Fisk. By the time of McKenzie's appointment as President in 1915, the board of trustees had long realized that Fisk's success depended upon philanthropic assistance. Funding from the American Missionary Association amounted to very little, and the poor economic circumstances of many Fisk students precluded meaningful tuition and fee increases. Although generally supportive of their alma mater, Fisk alumni did not possess sufficient

wealth to provide significant financial support. In accepting the Presidency, McKenzie understood that Fisk's survival – let alone future success – depended on philanthropic assistance. As a man with grand ideas for Fisk's future, McKenzie began to focus on how and in what ways industrial support could help create a greater Fisk.

Shortly after accepting the position, McKenzie travelled to New York City to present a comprehensive report to the trustees that outlined his initial impressions of the University, and he offered preliminary recommendations covering 10 broad aspects of University affairs. McKenzie's evaluation provides a glimpse into his vision for Fisk prior to fully engaging with the University and its stakeholders.

Fisk's deteriorating physical plant, including the deplorable state of sanitary conditions at the University, alarmed McKenzie. With assistance from R.J. Selvidge, Superintendent of Construction at Nashville's Peabody College, McKenzie evaluated Fisk's buildings and grounds, including utility rates and insurance contracts. He found the University lacking in nearly every respect. "Our coke bill is three times what it ought to be," he told the trustees, and "our insurance rate is up to ten times that at Peabody." The toilets and bathing facilities "are in imperative need of immediate attention," and he requested that new sanitary facilities be in place by 15 September, partly as a means to "justify us in asking high standards from our students and alumni." McKenzie estimated the cost for necessary repairs and maintenance at \$18,000 (\$385,000 in 2010 dollars), which did not include \$5,000 (\$106,000 in 2010 dollars) for a central heating plant. He requested the Board appoint a committee to investigate more efficient heating and

lighting systems, noting that “Fisk must plan on a business scale if it is to take its place in the educational world.”¹¹⁰

Despite Fisk’s precarious financial condition, McKenzie recommended appointing a committee explore the opportunity of merging with Meharry Medical College, a Black institution in Nashville that at the time was in severe financial trouble. McKenzie seemed excited at the possibility for a merger, remarking that it would strengthen Fisk’s work in physical sciences, and provide the University “a valuable prestige in the field of Negro education.”¹¹¹ Perhaps he also believed the economies of scale enjoyed through a merger might alleviate some of Fisk’s current financial troubles.

McKenzie offered several recommendations regarding individual personnel matters based on input from Dean Cornelius W. Morrow, including suggestions for salary increases, promotions, and terminations of service. Most important to McKenzie, however, were his suggestions to enhance the size and capability of Fisk’s faculty. “To do the work that will put Fisk in the real leadership of Negro education,” McKenzie declared, “it will be necessary to strengthen the teaching staff, especially by the addition of highly trained, highly capable men to the University.” Moreover, attracting better qualified faculty will “mean better salaries than are now paid.” Hiring a Professor of Economics topped McKenzie’s wish list, someone who could develop business curriculum that would aid in “the development of Negro banks.” He envisioned Fisk as a

110 Fayette McKenzie, Letter to Board of Trustees, 8 February 1915, enclosure with a letter from Thomas Jessie Jones to Wallace Buttrick, 5 February 1915. GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272. McKenzie clearly forwarded an advance copy of his impressions to Thomas Jesse Jones prior to the trustee’s meeting in New York, who in turn passed it along to Buttrick, noting “I am eager that you may see the attitude which he [McKenzie] is taking toward his responsibilities as the future president of Fisk.”

111 Ibid. Although exploratory discussions regarding a merger with Meharry did take place throughout McKenzie’s first several years as President, the conversations never became serious.

laboratory for finance and accounting practice, suggesting students could “keep our own books,” and through education in insurance, could “disseminate the knowledge needed to bring an end to the wide-spread exploitation of colored folk by insurance fakirs, conscious or otherwise.”¹¹²

McKenzie anticipated reaching out to the Nashville community, remarking he would “sometime like to present certain ideas of the duty of Fisk to its immediate community and the southland at large.” Most immediately, he saw an opportunity for Fisk to provide teacher training for Black instructors from throughout the South during the summer months, and requested permission to begin a summer session in 1916.

McKenzie asserted that growing Fisk’s enrollment required an enhanced reputation and public image, and argued Fisk “must be brought back into the public gaze.” He elaborated:

To play its just and proper role of leader, Fisk must have prestige to attract and guide those who need leadership. To educate the national mind and national conscience to a steady support of real education for the Negro, a real Negro University must not only exist. It must be known to exist. Fisk must be known locally. It must be known to the colored people. It must be known to the white public.¹¹³

From a publicity perspective, McKenzie sought to leverage Fisk’s impressive music department and suggested developing a weekly musical program for all residents of Nashville that would bring visitors to campus and be “our permanent way of reaching the local public.” McKenzie also recommended reviving the Jubilee Singers, both as a

¹¹² Fayette McKenzie, Letter to Board of Trustees, 8 February 1915.

¹¹³ Ibid.

way to create awareness for Fisk and generate much needed revenue for the University.¹¹⁴ He considered outreach to the Black community especially important, arguing Fisk needed to reach the Black public through magazines and newspapers, through Fisk alumni, and via University extension work. Finally, he saw in his inauguration as President an opportunity “to attract the attention of the whole country,” an event that should “awaken wide-spread interest and secure general public approval for the University.”¹¹⁵

Achieving his dreams for Fisk required significant resources, and McKenzie told the trustees that fundraising by the President “is an infringement upon the efficiency of his main and proper work” and that “it would be much better if the Trustees would assume this burden or provide the right man to do so.” Despite his plea, McKenzie fully understood the role of the President in fundraising efforts, and he informed the trustees that “the President will not shrink from the task if laid upon him.” McKenzie believed that effective campus administration was the most important prerequisite to obtaining philanthropic and community support, and told the trustees he sought to create a campus environment of high achievement and ideals, populated with diligent and well-behaved

114 The Fisk Jubilee Singers is a vocal ensemble comprised of Fisk University students. The ensemble was first organized in 1871 to raise money for Fisk, which at the time was on the verge of financial collapse. After gaining limited popularity singing in several northern states, the Singers were invited to perform at the White House for President Ulysses S. Grant, which increased their popularity. In 1873, they toured Europe and raised \$150,000, with much of the proceeds used to build Fisk University’s first permanent building, Jubilee Hall.

115 Fayette McKenzie, Letter to Board of Trustees, 8 February 1915.

students, and a supportive faculty and staff – in short, “efficiency on the campus” – will “bring its main income to the University.”¹¹⁶

In the months immediately preceding McKenzie’s inauguration, he resided and worked in Washington, D.C., and in close proximity to Thomas Jesse Jones. With his strong connections to the GEB and other philanthropic foundations, as well as with prominent individuals within Black education, Jones likely served as an important mentor for McKenzie, and coached him on appropriate ways to interact with philanthropic foundations. Jones’s influence is evident in McKenzie’s 1 March 1915 letter to the General Education Board, calling its attention to several “pressing needs” at Fisk, including sanitation facilities and the need for a central heating plant. Julius Rosenwald had shortly before presented Fisk with three different scenarios of support, and McKenzie sought counsel of the GEB in determining how to proceed, remarking, “I shall be glad to confer with him [Rosenwald] along such lines upon advice from your board.”¹¹⁷

The General Education Board and Development of Fisk’s Board of Trustees

At the time of McKenzie’s appointment as President, Fisk University’s board of trustees consisted primarily of three groups of individuals: men connected with the American Missionary Association (AMA), Black leaders within Black higher education, and Northern businessmen, many of whom possessed strong relationships with industrial philanthropists and provided access to wealth and important White connections in the North. Leaders of Black institutions offered important perspectives in a Black educational context and, since many lived in the South, understood the region’s unique

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ McKenzie to General Education Board, 1 March 1915, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272.

socio-cultural conditions. AMA and religious representation on Fisk's board had dwindled over time, coinciding with their decreasing financial support of the University, and by the time of McKenzie's appointment as President the board contained only two representatives from religious organizations.

McKenzie understood a board composed of wealthy and/or well-connected individuals committed to the cause of Fisk and Black higher education aided fundraising efforts. In his February 1915 report to the trustees, he suggested the board be enlarged, and that existing trustees "provide a way to secure valuable new members."¹¹⁸ Apart from increased membership, the board required strengthening in other significant ways. Responding to a letter from Wallace Buttrick in late 1915 seeking his appointment to Fisk's board, Bruce Payne, President of George Peabody College in Nashville, remarked that "I recognize that Fisk is in very great need of some abler trustees than she now has. There are one or two good men on the Board. There ought to be others."¹¹⁹

Responsibility for recruiting new board members fell primarily to the three Fisk trustees most involved with administrative matters at the University, including Paul D. Cravath, chairman of Fisk's board, Thomas Jessie Jones, a director of the Phelps-Stokes Fund, and recent board appointee L. Hollingsworth Wood, a lawyer from New York. In addition to extensive contacts in the North (and Jones' significant contacts throughout the South due to his work in Black education), these trustees possessed strong relationships with industrial philanthropists, and they often asked GEB executives to lobby prospective

¹¹⁸ Fayette McKenzie, Letter to Board of Trustees, 8 February 1915, enclosure in a letter from Thomas Jessie Jones to Wallace Buttrick, 5 February 1915. GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272.

¹¹⁹ Buttrick letter to Payne, 29 December 1915. GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272. At the time of McKenzie's appointment as President, the Fisk board consisted of 11 men, three of them Black.

board candidates. The list of desirable qualifications for prospective board members included a willingness to support Fisk financially, and an ability to access and influence other men to help the University. Candidates also needed to support Fisk's commitment to Black higher education, although to the philanthropists and trustees genuine interest in Black education mattered less than money and influence.

Aggressive board development efforts after McKenzie's inauguration met with little success. Many candidates were too busy with work and other commitments to carve out additional time – limited though it would be – for another responsibility. Some felt uncomfortable supporting Black higher education because they didn't believe fully in the concept, or they thought industrial training more appropriate education for Blacks, or because they feared the social consequences of affiliating themselves with a Black institution. With wealth and influence the most important attributes for prospective board members, those who agreed to serve were often emotionally detached from the University. Content to serve Fisk from the North – usually through their contributions and contacts – they saw little need to visit Nashville and engage in the messy business of Black liberal arts higher education.¹²⁰

Trustees' lack of desire in visiting and becoming familiar with Fisk and its campus frustrated McKenzie. He complained that few trustees came to Nashville for board meetings, and instead attended trustee meetings in New York, if they attended at all. McKenzie believed "it is very important that our trustees shall know our campus and our work at first hand," by visiting Fisk's campus and experiencing the University's spirit

120 Further information regarding recommendations for the board and correspondence between trustees and prospective members may be found in the L. Hollingsworth Wood Papers, Haverford College Special Collections, Haverford, PA, box 19. Hereafter cited as LHW Papers.

and people.¹²¹ Trustee visits to Nashville allowed McKenzie to showcase Fisk's progress, and sensitize board members to the unique environment in which Fisk operated. Ella Sachs, daughter of Samuel Sachs, an influential New York banker, joined the board in 1918, but had never visited the University. A year later, McKenzie told Hollingsworth Wood, "I think you could find a first class excuse to bring Miss Sachs to Nashville from the fact that she is a trustee of Fisk and Fisk is the thing she ought to know about."¹²² The lack of interest among the trustees led an observer to remark to McKenzie in 1918 that "your board expects too much of you and is not giving you the active support you need and deserve."¹²³ The lack of trustee support also caught the attention of Julius Rosenwald as he reflected on his visit to attend McKenzie's inauguration: "One thing which made a very unfavorable impression upon me was the lack of interest of the Trustees. The president of the board had not been at the school in fifteen years and even on so important an occasion as the installation of Dr. McKenzie there were very few of the trustees present."¹²⁴

The trustees engaged Abraham Flexner, Secretary of the General Education Board, to assist with board recruitment efforts. In April 1917, Flexner sent a letter to several prominent northern businessmen soliciting their interest in becoming a Fisk trustee. The content of Flexner's letter, the majority of which remained constant

121 McKenzie to Wood, 30 May 1918. LHW Papers, box 18, folder 5.

122 McKenzie to Wood, 26 September 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 10. Ella Sachs was the first woman appointed to Fisk's board of trustees.

123 William Graves to McKenzie, 20 May 1918, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 14, folder 14. Graves was an employee of the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

124 Rosenwald to Abraham Flexner, 15 January 1917, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1273.

regardless of recipient, reveals the GEB's evolving position on Black higher education and its commitment to Fisk. "As we see the southern situation," Flexner remarked, "it is of the highest importance that two distinct types of education should be furnished to the southern Negro, viz, the industrial type and the academic type. The industrial type is well cared for by Hampton and Tuskegee. The most promising institution on the academic side is Fisk University." Flexner mentioned that he and Wallace Buttrick, who was then Chairman of the GEB, recently visited Fisk and "decided that the first step towards its development should be the rehabilitation of the plant on its physical side." He made clear the GEB's commitment to Fisk, and the ability of himself and Buttrick to direct significant resources to the University: "At our suggestion the General Education Board contributed \$50,000 for this purpose [improvement of Fisk's physical plant] and shortly afterward at Mr. Pritchett's suggestion the Carnegie Corporation contributed the same amount." With initial financial assistance secured, Flexner indicated "the next step, as we see it, is the strengthening of the Board of Trustees; the matter has been laid before several prominent persons in this city and elsewhere and there is every probability that several of them will accept the invitation to join the board."¹²⁵ Although Flexner could influence GEB policymaking for Black education, his powers of persuasion did not extend to the majority of influential citizens who received his solicitation. Despite the GEB's significant commitment to Fisk, and his declaration anticipating a positive response, Flexner's efforts to secure Fisk trustees failed to generate much interest.

125 Flexner to Harold H. Swift, 2 April 1917, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1273. In 1917 Wallace Buttrick became President of the GEB, and Flexner replaced Buttrick as Secretary.

Although eager to grow Fisk's board, Paul D. Cravath resisted doing so with black members. In early 1917, Mrs. Booker T. Washington suggested to Cravath that her husband, who died in 1915, be replaced on Fisk's board by Robert Russa Moton, successor to Washington as Principal at Tuskegee. Cravath told Hollingsworth Wood that "I think for the moment we have enough colored men on the board," and anticipated that Moton could replace George Moore, another black board member who Cravath hoped "we could arrange...to retire because of his ill health."¹²⁶

With board development efforts progressing slowly, McKenzie began to play a greater role in suggesting and vetting candidates. Eager to establish cooperation with progressive leaders in Nashville and the broader South, he told Paul Cravath that it is "very important to secure one or more local trustees representative of the best and most liberal thought of the South." McKenzie remarked he had in mind two men respected both in the white and black communities of Nashville. "They are young, enthusiastic and businesslike; they are both keenly concerned for Negro welfare; both are destined to prosperity if not large wealth – one of them may be counted today as wealthy."¹²⁷

McKenzie also sought to reestablish greater board representation from religious organizations. Although he realized the organizations contributed little financially toward Fisk, he appreciated their commitment to Black uplift and upholding strong Christian principles. In 1917, Fisk trustee Charles J. Ryder, a New York pastor and

126 Cravath to Wood, 14 June 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 1. In his reply to Mrs. Washington, Cravath indicated "I favor the election of Mr. Moton to our Board," but nonetheless resisted because "the election of Dr. Moton might convey the impression among the [Fisk] Alumni that there is a disposition to depart from the plan ultimately to make Fisk University a university in fact as well as in name." Cravath to Margaret Washington, 14 June 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 1.

127 McKenzie to Cravath, 5 September 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 13. The identities of the two men in question are unknown.

representative from the American Missionary Association (AMA), fell into ill health, and McKenzie wrote Cravath that when Ryder retired from the Board, “we shall have Dr. Beard left from the A.M.A. and none other. It is important that we have a representative of the Executive Committee of that body on our board.”¹²⁸ Two years later McKenzie invited two AMA representatives to the board, one of whom accepted.¹²⁹

Despite McKenzie’s desire to secure progressive Southern representation on Fisk’s board, obtaining commitments from suitable male candidates proved difficult, as many feared the social backlash of affiliating themselves with Fisk. McKenzie began soliciting for membership prominent women of the South, many of whom were active in social causes, including racial cooperation initiatives. Somewhat distanced from corporate business interests dominated by men, female candidates could through their prominent social standing help influence Southern opinion about the value of Fisk, and mobilize interest and support for the University in Nashville. Most important to McKenzie, however, were their progressive – and often public – attitudes about racial reconciliation and Black higher education.

In 1920, Kate Trawick accepted an appointment as a Fisk trustee. A leader in Nashville’s YWCA movement, Trawick was prominent in the public health movement, and a noted promoter of racial cooperation. At Trawick’s suggestion, the trustees solicited Dr. Belle H. Bennett from Richmond, Kentucky. A Southern Methodist lay leader and social worker who preached against race prejudice, Bennett conducted bible

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ McKenzie to L. Hollingsworth Wood, 19 September 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 10. McKenzie invited a Mr. McAfee and Dr. F. Q. Blanchard, with the latter accepting the invitation.

studies for Black church leaders, and after helping establish an industrial department for girls at Paine Institute for Negroes in Augusta, Georgia, had a dormitory on the campus named after her.¹³⁰ Trawick called her the “outstanding woman in all Southern denominations on questions of missions and race.”¹³¹

The social stigma of supporting Black education – especially in the South – transcended gender and continued to frustrate efforts at board development. Shortly after Trawick became a Fisk trustee, McKenzie reported to Wood that she “has been dropped from the Bethlehem Homes directorate because she was seeking too much publicity from her Negro connections, and because she has been made a trustee of Fisk. She is not worried.”¹³² Less than a week later, McKenzie told Wood that “There is no danger of any reactionary influence affecting Mrs. Trawick. She and her husband are paying the price perhaps even more than we at the University for liberal and correct views. Bolton Smith considers Mr. J [Trawick’s husband] the ‘most dangerous’ man of the South.”¹³³

130 *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, Volume II, G-O. Edward T. James, editor, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 132-133.

131 Trawick to Wood, 4 December 1921, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 13. Fisk board member Rev. W.N. DeBerry, the Black pastor at St. John’s church in Springfield, Massachusetts, wrote Wood that “I am in most hearty accord with the election of Miss Bennett to the Board. I am sure it will strengthen the Board to add to its membership a few prominent southerners who are sympathetic, thoroughly interested and broad visioned.” DeBerry to Wood, 22 December 1921, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 13. At the time of McKenzie’s inauguration in 1915, the Fisk board consisted of 11 members, all of whom were men. Over the next six years, three women were added, and by 1922 women constituted nearly 20% of the board, a percentage unheard of in higher education at the time.

132 McKenzie to Wood, 20 June 1919, LHW Papers, folder 18, box 9.

133 McKenzie to Wood, 25 June 1919, LHW Papers, folder 18, box 9. Bolton Smith was a prominent Memphis businessman considered a “friend” to the Negro. Mr. Arch Trawick was a prominent Southern businessman and manufacturer.

McKenzie's efforts in developing Fisk's board reflected his desire to influence member selection not solely based on wealth or connections, but on a genuine interest in Fisk University, racial cooperation, and Black liberal arts higher education. For some of the same reasons McKenzie endorsed Kate Trawick and Belle Bennett, he championed Judge Robert McMurdy of Chicago, a candidate who "is not wealthy and perhaps has not so great influence as other men whom we have tried (and failed) to secure," but who "will bring an interest and energy and high ideals to the work which we cannot well afford to lose."¹³⁴ Cravath's grudging approval of the selection reflects the differing opinion among McKenzie and some board members about desirable trustee characteristics. "I accede to your judgment that Mr. McMurdy shall become a trustee of Fisk University," Cravath said, "although I should not have chosen him."¹³⁵

Some historians critical of McKenzie's administration suggest that upon his appointment as President, and influenced by industrial philanthropists, he dismantled the board of trustees and reshaped it with individuals connected to industrial philanthropy or who were overly sympathetic with White Southern interests. The facts simply don't support this conclusion. Fisk's board experienced significant change during the first several years of McKenzie's administration due primarily to the death or incapacitation of some trustees and efforts to enlarge the group, not because of a sinister plot to remove unsympathetic voices. Over time, McKenzie played an increasingly active role in board development, but the effort was initially led primarily by Fisk's trustees – especially Paul Cravath – and Wallace Buttrick and Abraham Flexner of the GEB. As they struggled to

¹³⁴ McKenzie to Cravath, 18 September 1917, LHW Papers, folder 18, box 3.

¹³⁵ Cravath to L. Hollingsworth Wood, 27 September 1917, LHW Papers, folder 18, box 3.

fill board slots with northern businessmen – individuals who had money and connections but perhaps not a passionate interest in Fisk – McKenzie quietly influenced efforts to populate the board with individuals whose passion and commitment for Fisk and racial reconciliation transcended an ability to significantly impact Fisk financially. That two of the appointees were women, both outspoken on issues of race relations, also reflected McKenzie’s progressive attitude toward gender inclusion.¹³⁶

Fisk’s One Million Dollar Endowment Campaign

Securing liberal Southern viewpoints on Fisk’s board – regardless of whether male or female – represented a calculated strategy to influence Southern opinion for Fisk and Black liberal arts higher education. The trustees and philanthropists understood that inadequate support from Southern Whites marginalized Fisk’s educational efforts, and impeded progress for Black higher education in the South. The General Education Board’s \$500,000 commitment toward Fisk’s \$1 million campaign for Fisk included a condition that Fisk raise \$50,000 in Nashville, and with that charge came a renewed effort at soliciting Southern support.

136 James D. Anderson is the harshest critic of Fisk’s board development under McKenzie. According to Anderson, “McKenzie and the philanthropists restructured the Fisk Board of Trustees to reflect the new power structure “of industrial philanthropy, southern whites, and Negro accommodationists.” Anderson further suggests that “The traditional missionary egalitarians were gradually pushed off the Fisk Board of Trustees. They were replaced mainly by northern industrialists, southern whites, and a few Negro accomodationists who were virtually handpicked by industrial philanthropists.” Anderson failed to disclose that most of the Southern Whites on the board were women who possessed some of the most liberal racial views in the South or North, and that McKenzie sought to reestablish greater board representation among religious leaders. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 266-67. Fisk’s trustees did recognize the need for more progressive representation on the board. In a letter to Hollingsworth Wood endorsing Bolton Smith for a board appointment, Thomas Jesse Jones asserted that “It is important, too, that these men should be of the progressive younger generation. Mr. Bolton Smith is a very influential man, whose sympathies to the Negro are both generous and real. Jones to Wood, 22 June 1917, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 1.

In late 1919, Julius Rosenwald, CEO of Sears Roebuck and Company, pledged \$50 million to enhance salaries for college teachers in an effort to improve collegiate instruction. Rosenwald selected the General Education Board to determine beneficiaries of the funds and allocate the resources accordingly. Shortly after the announcement of Rosenwald's gift, McKenzie wrote the GEB requesting Fisk's inclusion among the recipients of the fund. Although Rosenwald's donation did not specifically target teaching salaries at Black institutions, McKenzie positioned his request to the GEB as one that represented "the interests of the colored citizens of the United States; they constitute not only a tenth of the population, but are the most needy and least provided for large group in that population." He also highlighted Fisk's unique contribution within Black education, noting that as the nation's largest private Black university, Fisk "hopes that the quality of its work and the correctness of its ideals will also justify you in providing an adequate endowment for its teacher salaries." After suggesting that a \$1,000 annual increase for fifty of Fisk's faculty would help secure and retain "the best possible teachers," McKenzie asked the GEB to "aid our teaching by an endowment of at least a million dollars," an amount that would combine resources from Rosenwald's gift with GEB funds already committed to Fisk. McKenzie quickly suggested that if such a large request could not be met, "the gift be made contingent upon the raising of a half a million or a million from other sources."¹³⁷

One week after McKenzie sent his letter to the GEB, Albert Houston (A.H.) Roberts, Governor of the State of Tennessee, and ostensibly at McKenzie's request,

¹³⁷ McKenzie to General Education Board, 16 January 1920, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1274.

wrote Wallace Buttrick, Chairman of the GEB, to comment on the importance of Blacks securing “full justice along all lines,” “proper educational training,” and “an opportunity for the exercise of his powers.” Roberts noted that “standing in the forefront” of these pursuits was Fisk University, and through higher education and development of Black leaders, they will be led “to higher and better things.” Although Roberts’ letter did not mention Fisk’s financial need, nor did make a specific funding request, it demonstrated to the GEB that Fisk had the support of Tennessee’s sitting Governor, and that he was sympathetic to the welfare of Black education in Nashville.¹³⁸

On the heels of Roberts’ letter came correspondence from several prominent Nashville businessmen – again at McKenzie’s behest – to Buttrick asking that Fisk be granted “at least a million dollars for teachers’ salaries,” and declaring “we believe that this institution that has meant so much to the nation should be placed in the front ranks of those to be endowed by Mr. Rockefeller.” Buttrick responded three days later, noting that “you may be sure that the University will not be neglected by us, and we very much appreciate this endorsement by prominent white citizens of Nashville.”¹³⁹

After McKenzie and Hollingsworth Wood travelled to New York to meet with Buttrick regarding a gift to Fisk, Wood formally applied to the GEB seeking \$500,000 as an endowment for teachers’ salaries. The combined efforts of Wood and McKenzie were rewarded on 27 May 1920, when the GEB granted Fisk \$500,000 toward \$2,000,000 “to

138 Roberts to Buttrick, 22 January 1920, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1274.

139 McKenzie to The Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 7 June 1920, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 4. McKenzie likely sent the letter from Nashville’s business leaders to the GEB. In earlier correspondence to Hollingsworth Wood, he proposed a strategy to solicit the GEB for inclusion in the disbursement of Rosenwald’s gift. McKenzie suggested he will write GEB and, “I shall send the Nashville [businessmen’s] letter about a day later, trusting that the two documents may reach there at about the same time.” McKenzie to Wood, 7 January 1920, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 1.

be set aside and maintained inviolate by Fisk University as endowment, the income to be used in providing permanently for increases in teachers' salaries." In addition, the GEB allocated \$25,000 in 1920-21 and 1921-22 to immediately increase teachers' salaries.¹⁴⁰

Less than a month later, the GEB revised stipulations of the gift, reducing the total campaign amount to \$1 million, half of which Fisk needed to raise.¹⁴¹

With the campaign for Fisk University underway, McKenzie led efforts to mobilize support in Nashville and throughout the South. The context for Fisk's aggressive Southern outreach differed significantly from efforts to raise interest and funds among the Northern corporate elite. The trustees, along with philanthropic assistance, spearheaded fundraising efforts in the North. With Northern opinion generally more sympathetic to race relations, Northern benefactors faced few, if any, personal, social, and business consequences by helping a Southern Black institution. They could provide support from afar, and remain socially and emotionally detached from the repressive racial environment of Nashville. The task of mobilizing financial support in the South fell firmly on McKenzie, who was assisted in later years by trustees living in the South, most notably Kate Trawick.

Beyond McKenzie's natural inclination to engage with Nashville through various community outreach efforts, the task of raising \$50,000 as part of Fisk's endowment

140 McKenzie to The Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 7 June 1920. LHW Papers, box 19, folder 4. On 1 July 1920 the GEB revised stipulations of the gift, reducing the total amount to be raised to \$1 million from the original \$2 million. W.W. Brierley to McKenzie, 13 October 1920, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1274. Brierley was the Chief Clerk of the GEB.

141 W.W. Brierley to McKenzie, 13 October 1920, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1274. Brierley was the Chief Clerk of the GEB.

campaign amplified the sense of urgency to connect with influential White constituencies. As a result, McKenzie engaged with White community groups more fully than any previous Fisk president, becoming a member of the Kiwanis Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and the director of the Community Chest. He attended luncheons, hosted groups on Fisk's campus, and frequently spoke at organizational gatherings. A calculated strategy, his outreach led to "white friendship for the school [that] was stronger than during any preceding administration."¹⁴²

Developing support for Fisk among Southern Whites required a delicate approach. Soliciting goodwill for Fisk in settings where many didn't believe in any form of Black education required McKenzie to carefully articulate the University's position as a leading Black liberal arts university with assurances that Fisk students and graduates had no interest in agitating for social conditions inconsistent with prevailing Southern sensibilities. Instead of focusing on his grand vision for Fisk and Black higher education – a message which could easily alienate Southern opinion – McKenzie emphasized features of Fisk that fit more comfortably within the South's perspective on race relations. His messages of economy and thrift, both on the part of the University and its students, strict student discipline, strictly regulated student conduct, and a minimum of extra-curricular opportunities presented Fisk as an educational environment devoid of influences that might encourage students to challenge racial norms in the South.

Despite working in a Southern environment largely unsympathetic to Black education, McKenzie's efforts in engaging Nashville met with some success. He enjoyed the trust and respect of White organizations with which he affiliated, if only because the

¹⁴² Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 5-77.

organizations viewed him as a strong leader sympathetic to social norms in the South. Still, raising money in Nashville proved difficult, as prospective donors more easily dispensed oral support than financial contributions, and the social stigma of financially supporting a Black college dissuaded potential donors. As repercussions of Kate Trawick's appointment as a Fisk trustee suggest, affiliating oneself with Fisk risked significant social consequences. Despite the challenges, McKenzie eventually succeeded – with the significant help of Trawick and others – in securing the \$50,000 from Nashville required as part of the campaign, including \$2,500 from the Community Chest of Nashville.¹⁴³

Historians routinely cite McKenzie's cozy relationship with Nashville Whites as evidence of his racist or, at best, insensitive administration. Such analysis, however, largely fails to take into consideration the extent to which industrial philanthropy influenced and shaped McKenzie's outreach to Nashville.¹⁴⁴ With the trustees and philanthropists counting on him to raise support in the city to meet conditions of the GEB's gift, McKenzie had little choice but to aggressively engage with Nashville Whites. His desire for affirmation from the philanthropists, and his eagerness to demonstrate to Fisk's trustees his fundraising capability provided additional incentives to engage Southern Whites. During one difficult period with the endowment campaign sputtering along, McKenzie informed Hollingsworth Wood that "I am doing my best to hold Nashville steady and the situation is pretty satisfactory, but there is grave danger of

143 McKenzie to Wood, 22 March 1922, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 5.3.

144 James D. Anderson, Raymond Wolters, and Lester Lamon ascribe McKenzie's interest in courting Nashville Whites to his personal (racist) interests, motivations, and beliefs. Anderson, *Black Education in the South*, 265-269; Wolters, *New Negro on Campus*; Lamon, "Fisk University Student Strike."

discouragement setting in unless the wheels begin to move soon. I want to do my part.”¹⁴⁵ During more positive periods he shared reports of his progress with a confidence bordering on sheer bravado. After meeting with several White Nashville business and community organizations, he proclaimed to Thomas Jesse Jones, “Somehow I feel that never before in the United States has a white man in our work had such a hold upon a city as I now have on Nashville.”¹⁴⁶ In conveying impressive demonstrations of how White Nashville supported Fisk and his administration, McKenzie sought to instill confidence among trustees and philanthropists about his effectiveness in raising funds among White Southerners.

In his excellent institutional history of Fisk, Joe Richardson examined McKenzie’s presidency largely absent the influence of industrial philanthropy. Richardson suggested that McKenzie was “sincere and courageous” in his approach to race relations, and believed his “work within the system” approach was “the only key to the solution of the race problem.” Although many Blacks and most Whites agreed with him, Fisk students and alumni resented McKenzie’s attempts to win Southern White opinion for Fisk, primarily because of the compromises McKenzie made to obtain such acceptance. He refused to tolerate Black assertiveness, “suppressed ‘radical’ ideas, and encouraged students to be unobtrusive.” Although McKenzie “decried violence, injustice, and segregation” and believed firmly in racial justice, gaining trust and approval on Nashville Whites influenced his administrative agenda. According to

145 McKenzie to Wood, 3 January 1920, LHW Papers, box 21, folder 11.

146 McKenzie to Jones, 19 February 1925, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8, frame 782.

Richardson, McKenzie was “not sufficiently militant” to satisfy Fisk students and alumni.¹⁴⁷

McKenzie’s aggressive solicitation of Nashville Whites and his corresponding enforcement of a strictly regulated campus environment clearly illustrate the operationalization of philanthropic influence at Fisk. While McKenzie’s background, experience, and educational beliefs certainly informed to some extent his administrative approach, the overarching importance of raising funds and meeting philanthropic expectations both altered and amplified McKenzie’s actions.

The General Education Board’s Influence on Fisk University’s Administrative Affairs

Ceremonies and events at Fayette McKenzie’s inauguration in November 1915 reflected the racial attitudes of Fisk’s new President. At his formal installation, five Black and five White men shared the stage and spoke about the promise of Fisk, leading one observer to remark that the festivities left every person feeling unfaithful to his duty if he were not striving to help improve the conditions of Blacks.¹⁴⁸ Other inaugural events were likewise integrated, causing several attendees to remark to Mrs. McKenzie that they had never before seen Blacks and Whites engage socially in such a friendly manner.¹⁴⁹

In the first several months of his administration, McKenzie aggressively advocated for Black rights. When Nashville officials erected a sign reading “This drinking fountain for whites only” in a local park, McKenzie vigorously protested and

¹⁴⁷ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 77-78.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 72.

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Nellie McKenzie to “Dearest Folks,” 13 November 1915, McKenzie TSLA Papers.

asked the city to open the park to Fisk students. Observing the Jim Crow seating arrangements in Nashville auditoriums, he lobbied to end the practice. Serving on the State Council of Social Agencies, McKenzie observed that special arrangements were made for mentally incompetent and delinquent White youths, but not for Black youth. He charged the practice was unfair, worked to obtain appropriate facilities for Black youths, and requested the state create a vocational school of wayward Black girls.¹⁵⁰

With Fisk's growing reliance on industrial philanthropy, especially during the endowment campaign, McKenzie's natural and progressive approach toward race relations that marked his first 18 months in office gave way to a strategy more aligned with the interests of industrial philanthropy. Uninterested in funding a Black college intent on agitating Southern sensibilities about race relations, philanthropists sought an administrative approach at the University that tolerated existing Southern social mores. Southern White support was crucial to Fisk's success, and obtaining it – especially in Nashville – required that every aspect of Fisk's operation support the notion of racial cooperation and conciliation so important to Southern whites. As a result, Fisk's leadership (McKenzie, trustees, and philanthropists), portrayed Fisk in Southern circles as a leading Black liberal arts university with high academic standards – a place of order and stability where student personal conduct was strictly regulated and enforced, and educational efficiency valued. On campus, Fisk students focused single-mindedly on their classroom education, did not concern themselves with the social and racial realities of the South, and a strong (white) President maintained firm control on all aspects of University affairs.

¹⁵⁰ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 78.

Attempts to portray Fisk to White Nashvillians as an institution that respected Southern social tradition led McKenzie to tightly control activities on campus. He sought to eliminate student controversy, student dissension, and unfavorable student, faculty, and staff expression – in short, anything that raised questions in the minds of Southern Whites about a rebellious nature among Fisk students, or McKenzie’s ability to manage and “control” Fisk. McKenzie’s strict campus policies and more intentional outreach to White Southerners caused consternation among some Fisk faculty, staff, and students, but it paid dividends with Nashville Whites. In a letter to the General Education Board endorsing Fisk’s endowment campaign, the Commercial Club of Nashville lauded McKenzie’s efforts:

For the important tasks of interracial reconciliation we look to Fisk as to no other institution. For the establishment of educational standards Fisk is a beacon of light for the whole South. ...Fayette McKenzie came into our midst unknown, and has by his wise administration and efficient methods won our hearty co-operation. We have had almost daily opportunities to judge the man and his work, and can unhesitatingly say that we believe him to be the right man in the right place.¹⁵¹

Similarly, the Nashville Chamber of Commerce passed a resolution proclaiming that “Dr. McKenzie has done much to cement the good feeling between the white and colored races in Nashville and the South. He has understood the needs of both...and at no time in the history of Nashville has a better feeling existed than during the presidency of Dr. McKenzie at Fisk.”¹⁵²

151 Commercial Club of Nashville to General Education Board, 24 January 1920, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1274.

152 Resolution for Dr. F. A. McKenzuie. Nashville Chamber of Commerce. ca. spring, 1925. McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 1, folder 1, frame 20. The Nashville Kiwanis Club passed a similar resolution commending McKenzie’s work at Fisk, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 1, folder 1, frame 29.

Influencing Southern White opinion and promoting a campus environment and operation that projected desirable images of Fisk required careful public relations in the White community. Fisk's leaders used Nashville's White newspapers, the *Banner* and *Tennessean*, to promote an idealized image of Fisk to White readers, and both papers supported and complimented McKenzie's administration. When situations arose that threatened Fisk's carefully managed veneer, McKenzie often turned to the trustees for an endorsement of his administration, which was promptly published in the *Fisk News* and sent to the Nashville papers. McKenzie's efforts won public support for Fisk, and announcements like those from the Commercial Club and Chamber of Commerce communicated the polished image Fisk's leadership sought to convey to White Southerners: a Negro institution committed to high standards under the direction of a strong and disciplined educator, fully supported by the board of trustees, with students committed to pursuing peaceful cooperation with Whites.

Notwithstanding industrial philanthropy's significant assistance to Fisk, financial problems persisted throughout McKenzie's administration. Without annual appropriations from industrial philanthropy, Fisk could not survive. Despite McKenzie's desire to leave fundraising duties to the trustees so he could focus his efforts on educational matters, including curriculum, teaching, and learning, much of his time was spent obsessing over business related issues: making Fisk more financially efficient, managing day-to-day business transactions, and raising money.

Securing sufficient funds to meet daily operational expenses proved a constant challenge and source of frustration and stress for McKenzie. One day in January 1920,

McKenzie requested Wallace Buttrick mail him a check that evening, as finances were so tight Fisk might be forced to borrow from a bank for current expenses.¹⁵³ In March 1921, he told Hollingsworth Wood “If by any good fortune we can succeed in paying salaries the first of April, we shall nevertheless utterly fail the first of May unless new resources are found.” Ten days later, he reminded Wood that “the position in which we find ourselves is very desperate and there is not the slightest hope of paying salaries in May or June unless we can get in enough money to meet these two items – at least \$20,000.”¹⁵⁴ In December of the same year, McKenzie informed Thomas Jesse Jones that unless Fisk received committed funds from the Carnegie Foundation and Phelps-Stokes Fund, the University may not meet payroll.¹⁵⁵

The constant search for money compromised, but did not preclude, McKenzie’s efforts at improving Fisk’s curriculum and instruction. It did, however, take attention away from these areas, as McKenzie remarked to Hollingsworth Wood:

If I am the man for this place it would be a great mistake to let me fail physically and professionally for lack of financial aid which we have counted so this year. If we could have secured aid from the Big Boards [industrial philanthropists] that would have assured us financially for the four years, we would have had a breathing spell in which to demonstrate that all the various standards (and they are real standards) which have been set up in the last three years would prove not only valuable but really popular.”¹⁵⁶

Fisk’s financial distress led Carl Getz, a public relations professional hired to generate publicity for Fisk during the endowment campaign, to offer his services *pro*

153 Memorandum from Buttrick to E.C. Sage, 15 January 1920, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1274.

154 McKenzie to Wood, 19 March 1921. McKenzie to Wood, 29 March 1921, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 13.

155 McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, 5 December 1921, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 13.

156 McKenzie to Wood, 8 January 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 8.

bono. “Because Fisk University is so poor, I don’t see how we conscientiously can take much more money from it,” he wrote McKenzie. Getz’s work on behalf of the University convinced him that “...Fisk can take the lead in this country in promoting better race relationships. But to do that takes money and that money isn’t available. It seems to me that I should make a contribution in the form of personal service...and should serve you without compensation.”¹⁵⁷

Fisk’s financial problems curtailed several programmatic and community outreach initiatives envisioned by McKenzie early in his Presidency. Ironically, many of these ideas revolved around greater engagement with Black communities in Nashville and the South. McKenzie understood that engaging with Fisk’s community – and especially the Black community with academic programming – helped enhance Black opinion of Fisk and served as a source of students. Further, opportunities that allowed Fisk students to train in community settings – say, in social work or teaching – benefitted both Fisk and the community. He often argued for such programming, as he did in a letter to Hollingsworth Wood in early 1919:

There are many things we ought to do to develop a cordial relationship with the town and adjacent country, and many ways in which we might be of real service to them. It would take a small fund to enable us to gather together once in a while and to interest the colored clergy, the colored teachers, and the neighbors. We ought to be doing extension work in community singing in Nashville and over the state, and a similar work in extension lectures. A night school on the campus is one of the urgent needs of our situation and of our city.¹⁵⁸

In the same letter, McKenzie suggested that a summer session would allow Fisk to pursue initiatives not possible during the year.

¹⁵⁷ Getz to McKenzie, 13 March 1922, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 5.3.

¹⁵⁸ McKenzie to Wood, 18 April 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 9.

For instance, if we had the fund we might gather a group of preachers for two weeks, or four weeks, or longer, do them some good. As we develop our courses along religious and recreational lines we probably shall be able to develop the equivalent of a Y.M.C.A. training course, and we may be able to utilize our more advanced students to real advantage in the churches and Sunday schools of the city.¹⁵⁹

In addition to engaging with the Nashville community, McKenzie sought to raise international awareness and money for Fisk by hiring a fundraiser to travel abroad. He also looked to connect more effectively with religious denominations, and mentioned to Wood his desire to “renew and strengthen the interest in the Congregational Church in Fisk.”¹⁶⁰

Lack of funding and administrative priorities focused on the endowment campaign precluded most of McKenzie’s ideas from being implemented. The industrial philanthropic agenda for Fisk prioritized engagement with Nashville’s White community over outreach efforts to Black communities, and despite his desire to engage with more fully with Black populations, McKenzie instead focused his time developing relationships with Whites.

Perhaps more so than anyone connected with Fisk, McKenzie felt the weight of the endowment campaign on his shoulders, and he struggled to meet the sometimes competing expectations of Fisk’s many stakeholders, including philanthropists, trustees, alumni, Nashville’s White and Black communities, and Fisk students, faculty and staff. Although responsible for securing \$50,000 from Nashville’s White community for Fisk’s endowment campaign, McKenzie’s greater challenge involved ensuring the idyllic

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ McKenzie to Wood, 14 August 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 2.

portrait of Fisk communicated to White constituencies fit the reality, including comforting Southerners that Fisk's education – and its student body – respected the Southern perspective of racial cooperation and conciliation. McKenzie captured the intensity of the environment in a letter to Wood: "...you must make allowances for the fact that I am literally on the firing line and every day – it sometimes seems every hour – the barrage fire is threatening the integrity of our lines."¹⁶¹

As McKenzie's closest contact on the board of trustees – and one who understood well the Black experience in the United States – Hollingsworth Wood recognized the difficult environment in which McKenzie worked. In 1922, Wood expressed hope to Wallace Buttrick that an anticipated donation of \$5,000 would temporarily ease McKenzie's burden, observing "it will I am sure take some of the load of care, which we always feel is crushing that little man, off his shoulders." Wood continued that, "The last sentence of his letter to me...reads: 'I am very greatly pleased with the present situation and the prospects.' This is the nearest approach I ever saw him make to the language of inebracy."¹⁶²

The demands and pressures of satisfying myriad constituencies with competing interests, effectively administering day-to-day activities at the University, dealing with constant financial distress, and managing fundraising efforts in Nashville took an emotional toll on McKenzie. After an especially difficult period, McKenzie remarked to Wood that, "Possibly I never felt so discouraged and isolated as I have the last three

161 McKenzie to Wood, 8 April 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 9.

162 Wood to Buttrick, 22 June 1922, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1275.

months.”¹⁶³ With the philanthropists and influential trustees residing in New York, McKenzie often felt disengaged from important decision making, and the lack of support from many of the trustees added to his sense of isolation. Many Northern trustees did not fully understand or appreciate the daily pressure and stress inherent in the role of Fisk president. After an unusual McKenzie outburst regarding campaign fundraising details, Thomas Jessie Jones remarked to Hollingsworth Wood that, “Dr. McKenzie is very close to the battle front and therefore apt to become a little emphatic in his comments.”¹⁶⁴ The stressful environment led McKenzie to hint at resignation on several occasions. Although these threats were more scare tactics to induce action or funding for certain issues than sincere feelings about quitting, the fact he raised the issue suggests the significant difficulties he faced.¹⁶⁵

Although other circumstances certainly contributed, the omnipresent need for Fisk to present an image of order and stability to conform to White Southern expectations effected profound changes on McKenzie’s leadership style. With the endowment campaign in full force, Fisk operated under a microscope – especially in Nashville – and any circumstance incompatible with the carefully crafted Fisk image required immediate action to rectify. Trusting very few of his colleagues at Fisk and unable to effectively delegate, McKenzie began to micromanage campus affairs. Fearing that disturbances on

163 McKenzie to Wood, 12 July 1921. LHW Papers, box 19, folder 13.

164 Jones to L. Hollingsworth Wood, 30 September, 1919, box 18, folder 10.

165 McKenzie told William H. Baldwin III that “I shall soon be rendered useless for any large results...unless the general position I imply can be taken at an early date.” McKenzie to Baldwin, 22 December 1922, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 1. Baldwin, whose father was the first Chairman of the GEB, was hired to lead Fisk’s campaign efforts in New York City, and he assumed a position on Fisk’s board shortly after the endowment campaign was announced.

campus would suggest to observers a lack of administrative ability and authority, he sought to control nearly every facet of Fisk's operation, with an emphasis on regulating all forms of campus, and especially student, expression.

Although many Fisk faculty and staff supported McKenzie, some resented what they considered autocratic policies, and bitterly complained. McKenzie viewed such dissent as disloyalty, an affront to his policies and leadership, and a threat to the carefully crafted Fisk image so vital to the success of the campaign. In some cases, McKenzie sought to remove faculty and staff he considered disloyal. Predictably, his actions simply caused greater consternation among faculty and staff, and some Fisk employees accused McKenzie of using spies on campus to root out dissenters. Remarking on Fisk's situation shortly before McKenzie's resignation in 1925, Fisk Dean James L. Graham noted that "another difficulty resides in the type of executive we have encouraged here." His comments suggest the philanthropists and trustees encouraged the concentration of power in Fisk's President. Graham characterized McKenzie's role as president:

He alone is held responsible. He is required to put his program across or be held accountable for failure. He must rally support to every project or he fails. Why, if even an entertainment fails to which he urges students attend, it reflects upon his success. It is not fair. It is not an educative type of administration. Even good things can be put over in ways that build attitudes that are harmful and that trample upon the respect and freedom of those whom they seek to benefit.¹⁶⁶

There is little doubt McKenzie sought to create a campus community that reconciled his personal beliefs of education, pedagogy, and school administration with

166 Letter from Graham "To The Trustees and Members of the Greater Fisk Committee and No Others," 6 April 1925, LHW Papers, box 24, folder 23.2. The Greater Fisk Committee was established to look into the events surrounding a Fisk student riot of 4 February 1925. In addition to identifying several problems at Fisk, Graham's 11 page letter offers several recommendations to improve administrative structure, curriculum, and student affairs.

philanthropic and Southern expectations of campus management. His suspicion of staff discontent regarding his administration was justified – several disagreed with his policies and disliked his management of the University. Aware of this, McKenzie sought employees who fully supported his administration. In a revealing letter, Fisk faculty member Edith G. Herbst, who was sympathetic to his administration, wrote McKenzie and wondered if what “you are trying to have here [at Fisk] is not an organization, but an organism – a group of people who are drawn together by seeing and believing the same essential things so clearly that they can function together in harmony.” McKenzie drew an arrow to the passage in the margin and wrote “Right.” Reflecting further on her theory, Herbst continued: “...I can see that it is different – an evolution from forces within, not an imposition from without.” Again, McKenzie drew an arrow to the passage in the margin and noted, “Right.”¹⁶⁷

By strictly controlling campus – and especially student – affairs, McKenzie hoped to prevent problems that might tarnish Fisk’s carefully crafted image. Under close scrutiny and with intense pressure to meet expectations, McKenzie’s natural disposition toward discipline mutated to an authoritarianism that grew out of his perceived need to effectively manage all aspects of Fisk’s campus affairs. He feared that relinquishing control or influence could only lead to problems and reflect poorly on himself. He admitted to Hollingsworth Wood that “...under the very peculiar conditions at Fisk and

167 Herbst to McKenzie, 18 August 1922. LHW Papers, Box 24, Folder 24.1. The memo is interesting not only for its content, but because McKenzie forwarded it to Henry C. Sherer, who came to Fisk in 1922 as Business Manager. Sherer forwarded the letter, along with other correspondence from McKenzie he had retained, to Wood in March 1925. Sherer, who became friends with McKenzie while the latter was at Ohio State, and whose son he named Fay, was harshly critical of McKenzie and his administration, and claimed promises McKenzie made to him regarding the scope and nature of his position were never fulfilled. See LHW Papers, Box 24, Folders 24.1 and 24.2.

in most of the colored schools, great authority and substantially the bulk of initiative must be centered in the president. I realize that this might seem autocratic, but it is the one hope for the continuance of any man in such a position, unless we are willing to forego any considerable hope of high standards or of progress.”¹⁶⁸ Several years later Wood told McKenzie, “The one criticism that I really have of your administration is your seeming inability to hand responsibility to other people and make them care for it without your worrying.”¹⁶⁹

Leaders of all black colleges in the South in the early 1900s faced extraordinary challenges managing their institutions. The depth and breadth of the obstacles faced by the president of a leading Black liberal arts university in the segregated South who received significant funding from industrial philanthropists are difficult, if not impossible, to fully appreciate and comprehend. Fayette McKenzie saw in industrial philanthropy an opportunity to create a Black institution on par with the best colleges in the country, and he believed realization of that dream would dramatically improve race relations among Blacks and Whites. Industrial philanthropists saw in Fisk University an opportunity to conduct a significant experiment in Black liberal arts higher education that, if successful, would also help improve race relations and expand Black uplift.

In small and subtle ways, McKenzie shaped the philanthropists’ agenda just as he helped further it. Yet, philanthropic influence disproportionately influenced McKenzie’s administration and Fisk’s future. Although philanthropic intent sought to facilitate Black education and uplift, fundraising in the South required McKenzie and the philanthropists

168 McKenzie to Wood, 8 April 1919, folder 18, box 9.

169 Wood to McKenzie, 5 August 1924. McKenzie Papers, Fisk University, Box 5, Folder 8.

to subordinate student and alumni interests to that of Southern interests. A short term-term approach to achieve long-term goals, execution of the strategy contributed to the student protests and alumni dissatisfaction that led to McKenzie's resignation. Yet, despite its controversial role in McKenzie's administration, philanthropic support created at Fisk a lasting foundation upon which the University solidified its place as one of the leading Black universities in the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

FAYETTE McKENZIE AT FISK UNIVERSITY, 1915-1925

Before McKenzie, Fisk had been a missionary college. Thereafter, it was a University.¹

– Frederick Brownlee

On 9 January 1866, less than one year after the end of the Civil War, three men – John Ogden, Erastus Cravath, and E.P. Smith – founded a small school for Blacks on the outskirts of Nashville. Cravath and Smith were employees of the American Missionary Association (AMA), a religious organization active in establishing schools for freedmen and promoting black education throughout the Reconstruction South. Ogden was Superintendent of Education for the Freedman’s Bureau in Tennessee, which was headquartered in Nashville.

A shared interest among the AMA and the Freedman’s Bureau for founding a school for Blacks in Nashville brought the founders together, and they purchased land and buildings using a combination of their personal funds and capital from the two parent organizations. Named Fisk School after Civil War hero Clinton B. Fisk, a Brigadier General in the Union Army and senior officer in the Freedmen’s Bureau during Reconstruction, the school offered free, Christian-based education for Blacks in primary

¹ Frederick L. Brownlee, *Heritage of Freedom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1963).

through secondary grades. The founders sought initially to use the school to help supply badly needed teachers for other Black schools throughout the South, and eventually, hoped to transform the school into a college that could provide Blacks with a strong Christian liberal education to prepare them for opportunities to serve their race.²

The backgrounds of the three founders uniquely qualified them for the work. John Ogden had a long history as an abolitionist, and in 1860 stated that “every child, white, red, or black, male or female, bond or free, rich or poor, high or low, domestic or foreign, has an inalienable right to an education.”³ In helping found Fisk, he hoped to demonstrate to Blacks that conversion to Christianity opened the door into both the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of science.⁴ Cravath was raised in an East Coast abolitionist family, attended Oberlin College, became an ordained minister, and served as a field secretary for the AMA. Smith had worked for the AMA in Minnesota promoting Indian civilization prior to his managing the AMA’s Cincinnati office, and after leaving Fisk was appointed United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Ulysses S. Grant’s Administration. Later in his career he was elected President of Howard University, a position he never assumed after suffering a fatal accident during a trip to Africa to help the AMA expand its mission work.⁵

2 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 4.

3 Dennis K. McDaniel. “John Ogden, Abolitionist and Leader in Southern Education.” In *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 87, Pt. 6. (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997), 8, 114.

4 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 10.

5 Augustus F. Beard, *A Crusade of Brotherhood: A History of the American Missionary Association*. (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1909), 146-149.

The ideals of Fisk School represented the intersecting motivations and beliefs of its founders and the influence of the organizations they represented. Most important was a shared belief in Black capability – that Blacks “could be enlarged in thought and mind by the same influences and methods of discipline which had proved their power in other peoples.” The founders also recognized the role Blacks needed to play in helping educate their race, and the importance of developing a Black leadership class. “No race can be permanently dependent upon another race for its ultimate development,” wrote an early historian of the AMA, and it “must work out its own future with its own teachers and educators.” Blacks’ tumultuous history – characterized by “barbarism and centuries of slavery” – could not “be upraised to Christian civilization and privilege by ever so much mere elementary education.” At an annual meeting on Black education in the 1860s, the AMA noted that “in common as well as in military life there must be leaders, and the mass will advance more rapidly because these march ahead. The leaders must be trained. For this Christian colleges are needful.”⁶

Establishing an educational system that educated the Black populous, provided teachers for Black schools, and offered advanced training to develop Black leadership required a comprehensive network of Black schools – grade, normal, and college. Nearly three decades prior to publication of W.E.B. DuBois’s essay, “The Talented Tenth”, the AMA envisioned a Black educational system that culminated in Black colleges where “exceptional pupils” obtained “exceptional education.” With a sense of urgency to “set

⁶ Ibid., 145, 47, 155-156.

the standards for the education of the race now!," the founders sought to create for Black what "is possible" and thereby advance the race.⁷

Just as important as the education itself was the context of instruction. In 1865, the AMA defined its mission to the freedmen as promoting their physical comfort, intellectual improvement, and spiritual welfare. Two years later, a resolution at the AMA's annual meeting declared the importance of religion in Black education and suggested only evangelical teachers staff Southern Black schools.⁸ Asserting "if education does not make for spiritual life and spiritual power, it is lamentably insufficient," the AMA proclaimed that "the gospel of Christ was to be put into every study, into every science, into every line of thought, and into every form of work." Indeed, "the hope of the race must find itself by being in the currents of God's holy love and will and providence."⁹ In Fisk's early years conversions to Christianity were celebrated with greater thanks and enthusiasm than material gifts received, and considered more important than academic accomplishment.¹⁰

Although the founders shared common beliefs regarding the necessity of Black education and the important role of Christianity within that education, their personal visions for Fisk diverged in a subtle but important way. When Fisk School opened, John

7 Ibid., 149. DuBois's "The Talented Tenth" was published in 1903 as part of a collection of essays written by leading African Americans. DuBois used the term to describe the need for one black man in ten to become leaders of their race largely through classical higher education. See Booker T. Washington, et. al., *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of Today*, (New York: James Pott and Company, 1903).

8 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 10.

9 Beard, *A Crusade of Brotherhood*, 146-149.

10 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 10.

Ogden resigned his position with the Freedman's Bureau and became principal of the new institution. Influenced by his previous experience as principal of the Minnesota State Normal Schools, he believed Fisk's primary purpose centered on teacher training, with elementary education left to other Black schools. Ogden reasoned that normal schools best addressed the most pressing needs for Black education throughout the South, and most Black students simply were not ready for college level work. Since Fisk lacked the funds to begin a meaningful college program, Ogden believed the school should prepare Black teachers, who could then instruct Black children in elementary schools throughout the South.¹¹

Ogden's emphasis on normal education contrasted somewhat with his colleagues' preference for Fisk's educational emphasis. Speaking at the opening ceremony for Fisk School, Cravath declared the institution would open "at first as a sort of High School and afterwards, if circumstances are favorable, [the buildings] are to be used as a college." Later in his address, in an effort to perhaps appease Ogden's vision, he added that "a feature of the school will be the instruction of those who wish to become teachers."¹² E.P. Smith largely shared Cravath's vision, and although he initially wanted Fisk to provide primary instruction for the Freedmen of Nashville, quickly became convinced that Fisk's future lay in collegiate education. Despite slightly different philosophies, the

11 Ibid. Ogden was not opposed to the mixed-school model, which combined primary, normal, and collegiate education – indeed, in his work at the Minnesota State Normal Schools he called the model ideal. Ogden's reluctance was likely due to pragmatic reasons driven by economic and demographic factors, not the philosophical framework of the mixed-school model. See McDaniel, "John Ogden, Abolitionist."

12 McDaniel, "John Ogden, Abolitionist."

founders' interests coalesced with each other more than they departed from one another, and they readily agreed upon the cause of their work, if not the specific approach.

Despite the founders' lofty goals for Fisk, they faced the reality that few Black students were ready for normal school training, let alone college work. Stephen J. Wright estimated that in 1865 as many as 96 percent of blacks were illiterate, and the strong demand for primary school instructors supported Odgen's preference for teacher training through a normal school.¹³ In 1866, the AMA recognized the need for increased focus on normal education, ostensibly for economic reasons. Officials felt it too expensive to send south White teachers to staff primary schools, and implemented a more cost-effective strategy of training lower paid Black teachers in normal schools, and sending them to the primary schools. The model also addressed the AMA's preference for Black teachers to teach Black students, especially in the lower grades. In May 1866, the AMA formally passed a resolution calling for immediate and focused attention on organizing normal schools, a decision consistent with Ogden's preference. The AMA's action proved prescient when in early 1867 Tennessee passed a law providing free, segregated, common schools to Black children. The legislation proved a mixed blessing for Fisk, as the opening of Black public schools in Nashville relieved Fisk of many of its elementary students. However, the new law made training of Black teachers even more important, as demand surged for teachers to staff the new schools. With little hope of regaining lost primary school enrollment, Fisk's founders agreed the school should focus on normal and

¹³ Wright, "The Negro College in America," 30.

higher education, a strategy that married Ogden's desire for teacher training with Cravath and Smith's interest in collegiate education.

Fisk University was incorporated on 22 August 1867, with the purpose of "education and training of young men and women, irrespective of color," and the power "to confer all such degree and honors as are conferred by the Universities in the United States." Because of the dearth of Black students capable of college-level work, Fisk did not enroll its first college-level class until 1871, and for its first several years operated as a normal school. The University soon developed a strong reputation among White and Black educators, and Fisk graduates taught in and administered Black schools throughout the South. In 1868, Dr. Barnas Sears, a general agent for the Peabody Fund and former President of Brown University, was so impressed with his visit to Fisk he granted the University \$800 in scholarships for sixteen Fisk students. Two years later, Sears proclaimed Fisk the best normal school he had seen in the South.¹⁴

From its beginning, Fisk adhered to high academic standards and strict discipline. The University's college curriculum in the 1870s approximated that in the majority of liberal arts colleges. In addition to regular subjects such as Greek, Latin, mathematics, and science, students received weekly lessons in the Bible. Still, the vast majority of students lacked sufficient preparation for college level classes. In 1872, Fisk enrolled 94 students in primary grades, 87 in intermediate, 35 in the normal school, 33 in college preparatory coursework, and only eight in the college. Students observed a strict daily regimen, waking at 5:30 a.m., attending daily chapel, and engaging in required study hours throughout the day. To promote economy, students deposited all their money with

¹⁴ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 13.

the treasurer upon enrollment. Strict rules prohibited private interaction between the sexes, gambling, and the consumption of tobacco and alcohol. Egregious rules violations led to immediate expulsion or, for lesser offenses, a “vigorous switching,” or public reprimand in chapel.¹⁵

Like most black schools at the time, Fisk suffered acute financial challenges. In 1871, with the indebted University on verge of collapse, George White, Fisk’s treasurer and music instructor, gathered a group of talented student vocalists and embarked on a short concert tour in Tennessee and Georgia, singing popular songs of the day. Encouraged by the nearly \$50 profit cleared on the venture, White planned a more comprehensive singing and touring schedule. With a troupe of nine singers, many of whom had been born slaves, the group began an ambitious tour of northern cities, and changed their repertoire from primarily White songs to Negro spirituals once sung by slaves. After a slow start, the singers became a sensation, singing for President Ulysses S. Grant in Washington, D.C., and enjoying a tour of the White House. In less than two months, they raised close to \$12,000 for Fisk and helped save the institution, earning enough money to purchase the present site of the University. Two years later the troupe, by that time known as the Jubilee Singers, raised over \$50,000 on a tour of Europe, the proceeds of which helped build Jubilee Hall, a building that still stands on Fisk’s campus.

In 1875, Erastus Milo Cravath, one of Fisk’s three founders, was appointed President. Over the next 25 years, despite deteriorating social conditions for Blacks in the South and continued institutional financial challenges, Cravath led Fisk through a period of near constant growth and expansion. The college department grew slowly, but

¹⁵ Ibid., 15-17.

by 1898 enrolled 54 students. As enrollment increased, so did the need for teachers, and Fisk's faculty swelled from 15 in 1876 to 35 by 1900. Most faculty were White, as qualified Black candidates were difficult to find, and among the handful of Black faculty, most were Fisk graduates. As enrollment grew, the physical plant expanded, funded almost entirely through donations. Between 1882 and 1897, completion of five new buildings expanded and improved campus facilities, including a gymnasium and workshop, a residence hall, Fisk Memorial Chapel, a president's residence, and Livingstone Hall, a classroom building. Although Fisk enjoyed enrollment growth and campus expansion during Cravath's presidency, financial problems persisted. Assistance from the American Missionary Society barely covered expenses, with additional revenue coming from tuition, room, and board fees, which were kept at a minimum to attract greater numbers of students. In 1888, total revenue amounted to \$5,883, and by 1900 the endowment totaled just \$44,967. During one particularly intense financial crisis, all faculty and staff salaries greater than \$25 per month were cut 20 percent.¹⁶

The environment of strict discipline continued during Cravath's administration. Fisk historian Joe Richardson characterized Cravath as "strong-willed and authoritarian," but a leader "of large vision, great faith, and positive convictions."¹⁷ Like Cravath, Fisk faculty members were Christian men and women who viewed themselves serving a higher purpose by working at the University. They brought to Fisk not so much an intellectual approach toward faith, but an applied Christianity they passed along to their students. Accordingly, all campus activities – classes and otherwise – were designed to

¹⁶ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷ Ibid., 41-46.

help develop students into “strong, earnest, broadminded Christian men and women who were to “give their lives to the uplifting and benefiting of their people.” The application of Christian principles played an important role in developing a unique Fisk spirit.¹⁸

When President Cravath died in 1900, an era ended at Fisk. Present since the University’s founding, under his stewardship the University graduated over 400 students from the college alone, and thousands more completed some educational training at Fisk. Despite significant challenges, he transformed a fledging school on the outskirts of Nashville into the most respected Black college of the time.

In 1901, Reverend James G. Merrill became Fisk University’s second President. Merrill had first come to Fisk in 1898 as Dean of Faculty and Professor of logic and moral science. Born in Massachusetts and educated at Amherst and Princeton Theological Seminary, Merrill served as a pastor in Congregational churches for several years prior to becoming editor of the *Christian Mirror*, a Congregationalist periodical. Consistent with Fisk’s Christian roots and his strong religious background, Merrill’s call for Fisk was “the development of Christian manhood in an education for service,” and as part of his vision he expanded the curriculum. In 1906, several college courses in applied sciences supplemented existing coursework in classical studies. The courses did not replace the typical college curriculum, but allowed students to explore areas such as

18 *Fisk University Catalogue*, 1890-1891, 56. Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville.

botany, meteorology, agricultural chemistry, floriculture, thermatology, and economic entomology.¹⁹

Although Merrill's professional and academic credentials sufficiently prepared him to lead Fisk, he did not possess strong fundraising skills. Wishing to build a new music building, he sought Booker T. Washington's assistance to solicit Andrew Carnegie for funds. Washington, who successfully lobbied Carnegie on behalf of other Black institutions, counseled Merrill the philanthropist would likely refuse a gift toward a music building, but he might be persuaded to give to a library project. Merrill accepted the advice, and Washington soon secured a commitment from Carnegie for \$20,000 toward the construction of a library, contingent upon the school raising an equal amount. Ecstatic over Washington's quick success, Merrill immediately invited him to speak at Fisk's upcoming commencement. The excitement, however, soon dissipated as Merrill confronted the task of raising a matching sum. Unable to meet the goal after two long years of work, he turned to Washington for help. Knowing Carnegie's fondness for his wife, Margaret Washington – who graduated from Fisk in 1889 – Washington suggested that she personally appeal to Carnegie and ask him to eliminate the condition of matching funds. After making the appeal, her husband immediately sent a letter to Carnegie admitting that Merrill was a poor fundraiser, but assuring the philanthropist of the President's excellent educational and administrative skills and that the building would be in good hands. The approach was successful, and Carnegie gave Fisk the remaining

¹⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 63.

\$20,000 to build the library, attributing his gift largely to Margaret Washington's influence.²⁰

Merrill's expansion of the curriculum with more vocationally-oriented courses, and his addition of a department of "Applied Science," caught the attention of W.E.B. DuBois. DuBois visited Fisk in spring 1908 to give the University's commencement address, and he used the opportunity to criticize Merrill's addition of industrial coursework at Fisk. Although Merrill had no intent to industrialize the Fisk curriculum, the fallout from DuBois's speech and continued problems in raising money led him to eliminate the new department and submit his resignation three months later. In a letter to Washington, Merrill admitted his shortcomings as a fundraiser, remarking "How I wish that I had been enough of a money getter to have felt justified in staying."²¹

After a short search aided by the efforts of Merrill and Washington, George A. Gates assumed the Presidency of Fisk. A seasoned college administrator, Gates served as President at Iowa State College, Grinnell College, and Pomona College in California prior to joining Fisk. Born in Vermont, he graduated from Dartmouth and, after spending two years in Germany, finished his formal education at Andover Theological Seminary. Booker T. Washington's first choice for the position, Gates represented a departure from previous Fisk executives whose religious zeal informed their administrations. Rejected for ordination by the Congregationalist Church in 1880 because of his belief in the theory of evolution (he would later become ordained), Gates' religious views caused concern

20 Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915, Volume 2* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1983), 181-182.

21 Ibid.

among some Fisk faculty, who believed he was not sufficiently evangelical.²² Gates' fundraising ability raised further concerns, as rumors suggested he left Pomona because "he could not raise the money for endowment." Nonetheless, Washington defended Gates, and suggested maintaining high academic standards trumped fundraising ability. Perhaps confident in his own ability to steer funds to Fisk in the event Gates proved ineffective at raising money, Washington boldly informed a colleague, "If the college does good work the money will come in some way."²³

Despite misgivings from his friends about taking the position at Fisk – an associate warned him, "That place down there – Fisk University – is on the firing line, if there is one on this planet" – Gates threw himself into the work.²⁴ He continued to raise academic standards and added greater flexibility to the curriculum, giving college students three options for a Bachelor of Arts: the classical degree, a scientific program adapted for industrial school graduates who wanted further training, and an education program for aspiring teachers. He completed the merger between the normal school and the college started under Merrill, and he hired George E. Haynes in 1910 to establish a social science department and a training center for social workers. With Haynes' early leadership, Fisk eventually became known as a leading center for sociological research on Black populations.²⁵

22 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 63.

23 Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee*, 183.

24 Isabel Smith Gates, *The Life of George Augustus Gates*. (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1915), 48. Although Mrs. Gates didn't name the colleague who made the remark, she referred to him as "One of the leading men of the nation, a preacher..."

25 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 64.

Both Merrill and Gates courted Southern White support for Fisk, much to the distress of Nashville's Black community. Washington warned Gates that Fisk was losing touch with local people of all races, and instead of reaching out to Blacks, Gates focused his efforts on enhancing Fisk's relationship with Nashville Whites. Nashville's outspoken Black newspaper, *The Globe*, criticized Gates throughout his administration, accusing him of transgressions that included rude behavior to Black campus visitors, sanctioning segregated seating for invited White guests at a Fisk commencement, and unwarranted firing of Black faculty and staff and replacing them with White employees.²⁶ Angry and frustrated with Gates' behavior, and believing the time appropriate for a Black leader, *The Globe* vigorously campaigned to hire a Black President as Gates' replacement.

In October 1910, Fisk's trustees approved a capital campaign to raise \$300,000. Despite Booker T. Washington's assistance, the campaign moved slowly. In February 1912, on his way to meet with trustees and the campaign committee in New York, Gates suffered a severe concussion in a train accident near Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Ordered to rest and recuperate in North Carolina, he briefly returned to Fisk to participate in commencement, but soon after his health deteriorated. During the summer, his wife submitted – without her husband's consent or knowledge – his resignation, and later that fall Gates died. Although he did not live to see completion of the \$300,000 campaign, which was fully funded during McKenzie's administration, Gates' improvements to Fisk's curriculum set the stage for future expansion.

²⁶ Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville," 227-228.

Fayette McKenzie's Arrival at Fisk

Fayette McKenzie's tenure as President of Fisk University spanned one of the most socially turbulent periods in the United States, and his appointment in 1915 coincided with the beginning of one of the most transformative periods in the history of Black higher education. Just six days after McKenzie's inauguration, Booker T. Washington died in Tuskegee, Alabama, leaving Fisk without its most effective agent for raising money, and America without its most influential – if not controversial – spokesperson for Black education. Absent Washington's impassioned defense of industrial education, and with increasing Black restlessness over social conditions in the South, the prevailing interest among many educators and philanthropists for an industrial focus in Black higher education began to slowly and irrevocably crumble. Although Washington's death marked the beginning of a transformation in Black higher education, socio-economic turbulence in the United States and growing black self-determination facilitated and drove the transformation.

As President of Fisk, McKenzie faced several challenges quite unlike those encountered by colleagues at White schools, and distinct even from executives at other Black institutions, most of which pursued an industrial education model. Beyond the daily challenges inherent in raising money, improving standards, and efficiently leading the nation's foremost Black liberal arts college in the South, McKenzie struggled appease Fisk's diverse group of stakeholders and balance their often competing interests for the University. Environmental factors also complicated administration of campus affairs, including World War I, an Influenza pandemic, escalating racial violence against Blacks,

growing Black self-determination (especially among youth), a severe economic recession, and strong nationalist sentiment that grew out of the War.

In his inauguration speech on 9 November 1915, McKenzie spoke of the “Ideals of Fisk,” which he asserted numbered only two. Like his approach in Indian education, McKenzie stressed the fundamental importance of culture in a Fisk education – of interpreting and imparting to students the purposes of society, and the “infusion of the soul of the group into the soul of the individual.” For McKenzie, the transcendent component of cultural transmission was religion. Education required teachers “of the highest and most vital culture,” and for McKenzie “no teacher is valuable at Fisk who does not possess the missionary spirit in its broadest and deepest sense.” McKenzie asserted religion helped inform Fisk’s pursuit of a liberal arts tradition rather than an industrial focus, and led to an education “for divinity and eternity rather than for existence and the present.” He made clear industrial education had no place at Fisk, declaring, “And never will Fisk sell the divinity of the souls in her care for a mess of pottage, however alluring.”²⁷

McKenzie asserted a cultural education included “the cultivation and intensification of the mental satisfactions of life,” and full and complete engagement in this pursuit left little time for superfluous activities. “When our minds and lives are so full of the great things of time and space that we have little room for the pettiness of gossip, of dress, of food and drink, of spectacle, of form, and of show,” he declared, progress will be made “towards the kind of culture which Fisk University is endeavoring

27 Fayette A. McKenzie, “The Ideals of Fisk,” McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 9.

to give to its students.... It is the aim of Fisk University to impart wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. This is culture.”²⁸

McKenzie believed a cultural education demanded discipline and sacrifice, and he stressed the importance of these standards, foreshadowing the strict policies he would implement at Fisk to facilitate the cultural education he sought. McKenzie elaborated on this concept of culture:

[It is]...the product of pruning and plowing. The soul like soil, is rendered capable of large harvests only by cultivation. Culture comes from the forcible tearing up of the weeds of idleness and ease. It is the struggle to subjugate both self and the world that gives culture to the soul. Struggle of the hands, struggle in industry, struggle with books, should all give culture. *Without struggle there is no culture. The iron ploughshare of discipline both in conduct and in study is the only effective instrument for the man who aspires to real education and real culture (emphasis added).*²⁹

The concept of service represented the second great ideal of Fisk. McKenzie asserted the sacrifices of former Fiskites – students, faculty, staff, trustees – represented “a thousand-fold more of sacrifice and devotion than can be suggested even by the dollars paid for the land and buildings. Fisk ideals have been paid for in sweat and blood.” The spirit of sacrifice permeated the University so “no one can honestly teach or study here who does not feel that he is the recipient of tremendous gifts...” So great was the debt to their forbearers, McKenzie suggested that from an economic standpoint “students can never begin to pay their way,” and, perhaps in an effort to underscore the privilege of attending Fisk – if not to instill a bit of guilt – he admitted that the University subsidized a significant portion of each student’s education. With Fisk’s fifty year legacy of

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

sacrifice, devotion, and hard work – manifest in the present by strict economizing across the institution so as to grant access to the greatest number of deserving students – McKenzie commanded Fisk students to a life of service, remarking: “Can any student go out from Fisk thus equipped with power without feeling that he owes the world large service?” He suggested that Fiskites render such service in work that is “effective and generous,” and “out of his own substance and time and money” should Fiskites “give generously to the world, to the dependent, to the needy, to the aspiring, as least as much as Fisk University and world have freely given him.”³⁰

McKenzie asserted Fisk stood poised to make significant contributions to the country’s progress. Declaring that it was the duty of Fisk, as it was any college, “to put a higher intelligence, an increased efficiency into every industry,” he stated the “function of Fisk [was] to increase the material wealth of the country.” He argued that poverty in the United States and the South “finds its chief cause in ignorance,” and through education and service, “Fisk University claims the right to say that it will be one of the chief factors in achieving larger prosperity for the South. Every dollar spent here in the creation of power may mean a thousand dollars of increasing in the wealth of the South within a single generation.”³¹

Some scholars suggest that McKenzie’s reference to Fisk’s role in increasing prosperity for the South signaled an attitude that condoned Black subservience. In fact, McKenzie intended quite the opposite. Poverty levels for Blacks in the South far

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

exceeded that of Whites in the early 1900s, and most Blacks had little, if any, formal education. Fisk's most important and popular program trained teachers to educate their Black brethren to help lift them out of poverty.³² Given the acute and pervasive nature of Black poverty in the South, McKenzie saw Fisk graduates – especially those trained as teachers – as engines of education that could help create Black economic opportunity and empowerment on a massive scale. He proclaimed, “The wider the spread of common school education, the greater the need for those who have a wider vision to lead the millions who aspire to escape from the bondage of ignorance or of limited education into the greater promised land.” McKenzie also recognized that Blacks needed leaders in areas outside of education, and he envisioned Fisk as “demonstrating the cultural value as well as the economic gain of college and graduate training for business and the professions as well as for works of charity, correction, and philanthropy.” Again, he predicted vast economic opportunities for Blacks in these occupations: “Immense sums will be saved and immense resources revealed as we increase the number of those who are highly trained in all these lines of work while the economic gains will be matched by the spiritual gains.”³³

McKenzie understood religion's important role and Fisk, and he bluntly put to rest any fear that his Christianity aligned more with the religiously ambivalent George Gates than with fervent believers like Ogden, Cravath, and Merrill. “Fisk is intensively interested in religion,” McKenzie declared, and he lamented the dearth of religious

32 According to McKenzie, 64% of Fisk graduates are “teachers of their own people.” Fayette A. McKenzie, “The Ideals of Fisk,” McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 9.

33 Ibid.

preparation at the University. “The lack of special training for teachers and leaders in the Church and in religion is most regrettable. Fisk should have, sometime will have, a school of religion built upon the widest and soundest foundation.” He pledged Fisk to a higher calling, suggesting that the University must work through all churches and all denominations “toward the establishment of the kingdom of God in all the affairs of this world.”³⁴

With Fisk’s strong Christian tradition and principles, McKenzie asserted the University must stand “for the great idea of peace.” Believing that peace between the races could not fail “where men are both intelligent and good,” he suggested that a foundation of peace be built upon “that quality of thought and soul which makes misunderstandings and bitterness and hatreds and war impossible.” Just as McKenzie believed education could erase ignorance and provide economic uplift, he asserted it could also increase the peace and prosperity of the nation by providing “graduates of high training and deep sympathies.” While the ideals of Fisk were culture and service, McKenzie declared the aims of Fisk are “moderation and gentleness and love and peace...”³⁵

McKenzie closed his inauguration address by exhorting Fiskites to dream big, and he tipped his hand regarding his agenda for the University:

Let us dare to be big! Friends, Trustees, Faculty, Alumni, and Students, let us commit ourselves to the task set before us. Let us dare to expect large resources,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

to plan large things. Let us say, not pleasure but achievement, not comfort but power, not ease but struggle. Let us dare to be a university!”³⁶

McKenzie’s Agenda For Fisk

When he arrived at Fisk, Fayette McKenzie quickly established an administrative agenda guided by four broad areas of focus: student conduct and discipline, increased academic standards and pursuit of accreditation, engagement with White and Black Nashville communities, and fundraising. McKenzie’s agenda blended his personal beliefs about education – discipline, standards, and community outreach – with the necessary function of raising money. He soon learned none of the priorities was mutually exclusive, and his success achieving the former initiatives facilitated his ability to raise money, and vice versa.

Influence of Religion at Fisk

Life at Fisk – and at most other private Black colleges established by northern religious organizations – reflected the Christian pietism of its New England founders. According to historians Henry Drewry and Humphrey Doermann, strong beliefs among faculty and administrators regarding “emphasis on good and evil, guilt and conscience, the Protestant work ethic, and a willingness to postpone gratification...were passed on both consciously and in deeper, less conscious ways to students.”³⁷ Fisk’s faculty and staff required that students conduct themselves according to Christian principles of character at all times. Although financial support to Fisk by religious societies all but

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Henry N. Drewry and Humphrey Doerman, in collaboration with Susan H. Anderson. *Stand and Prosper: Private Black Colleges and their Students*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), 130.

ceased by the second decade of the twentieth century, Christian influence continued in curriculum and administrative policies well into the 1920s.

McKenzie viewed religion as an important component of a Fisk education, and firmly rooted in the educational intent of its founders and the history of the school. “...More fundamental than intellectuality and even morality or character in the eyes of the Fisk successions of saints was religion,” McKenzie declared. “The Fisk founders knew that intellectuality alone can not save, certainly can not build character either for an individual or a race. Intellectuality is rescued from probable harmfulness and made positively valuable when it is backed by character and religion.” McKenzie believed religious devotion bred elements of character of sacrifice, both of which he sought to instill in Fisk students and, to some extent, faculty and staff. “The personality, that is the character of Fisk, must be maintained if Fisk is to do its major work, namely, inspire character in the individual students who pass through its doors,” he proclaimed. “Fisk must be character incarnate if Fisk is to offer character to others. The first duty of those who serve at Fisk is to know and to understand the history, the principles, and the spirit of Fisk.”³⁸

McKenzie sought to continue in his administration the stern and pious mentorship of students modeled by Fisk’s founders. “The Fisk builders, like the builders of every family, found it essential and wise to instill wise habits of life and conduct in their students not only by line upon line, and precept upon precept, but by regularity upon regularity, even requirement upon requirement.” McKenzie saw in a strictly proscribed

38 President’s Report, *Fisk University News*, January, 1924. Vol. XIV. No. 1. Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville.

regimen of student activity both the source of Fisk's success, and a unique feature that set it apart from other institutions. "Fisk has been one of the group of collegiate aspirants that has made its name and its soul an expression of wise guidance in the field of daily life and social convention," he asserted. "The product of this viewpoint...has been exceedingly noticeable. Guidance has made possible the pride which Fisk graduates feel in Fisk."³⁹

Serving at Fisk in the early 1900s required significant personal sacrifice, and McKenzie encouraged that Fisk students and staff model the University founders' commitment to religion and selflessness. "Religion at Fisk was not acceptance of a creed, or yielding to mere emotionalism," McKenzie declared. "Religion was so thoroughly the yielding of life for the sake of life, the yielding of self for the good of others, that it might almost be said that sacrifice and religion were for them one and the same thing." The spirit of sacrifice, McKenzie suggested, "was the great contribution the teachers at Fisk gave to their students. It constitutes the spiritual basis of the Fisk character." McKenzie linked the concepts of Christianity and sacrifice, suggesting that "sacrifice is not an action nor a deprivation. It is a spiritual attitude." He used Fisk's historical emphasis on character and sacrifice as a benchmark to evaluate and guide the present and future direction of the institution. "The degree to which we of the present prove faithful to the historic Fisk is the measure of our loyalty to the Fisk of today," he

³⁹ Ibid.

asserted. “Thus it is that the character of an institution is built. Consistency of policy is its general evidence. Consistency of spirit is its essential necessity.”⁴⁰

Student Conduct and Discipline at Black Colleges in the 1920s

Scholars routinely criticize McKenzie’s approach to student conduct and discipline. They suggest that his “autocratic” management style sought to repress Black determination, keep Blacks “in their place,” and demonstrate to White constituencies Fisk educated the “right” type of Negro.⁴¹ Yet, several important factors informed McKenzie’s approach to student conduct, including Fisk’s location in the South, conventional administrative practice at colleges and universities at the time, philanthropic influence, and perhaps most important, McKenzie’s deeply held convictions regarding appropriate educational practice. When evaluated from these perspectives, McKenzie’s approach to student conduct and discipline appears much less sinister than some scholars suggest, and more reflective of a conservative educator in a conservative environment.

McKenzie’s strict regulation of student conduct and discipline mirrored conventional administrative practice at many White colleges, and especially so at Black institutions. In nearly all cases, Black colleges offered lower grades in addition to college-level coursework, and younger students required strict oversight. When McKenzie arrived at Fisk in 1915, nearly half the student body was enrolled in pre-

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*, 285-268. Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville, 231. Wolters, *A New Negro*, 41.

college courses, and while that population decreased throughout his tenure, Fisk still taught high school classes well into the 1920s.⁴²

McKenzie believed that students' inadequate level of cognitive and social development required strict and uniform standards of conduct, and proscribed daily routines with a minimum of deviation. His approach was shared by most college officials at the time – many of whom completed their graduate education in late 1800s – who instituted rules and policies similar to those that governed their undergraduate and graduate student experiences. With many students distanced from oversight and control of their parents, college officials served as replacements for parental supervision, or *in loco parentis*, and enforced rules for conduct often more strict than that of their students' parents. At many Black schools, including Fisk, the focus on student conduct dovetailed nicely with behavioral expectations informed by Christian tenants and belief. Patrick Miller wrote that while McKenzie sought to improve academic standards and expand the curriculum, he was similar to several other educators of the era who seemed to “combine Washingtonian means to promote institutional authority with the ideals of DuBois concerning full development of the academic realm.”⁴³ Under severe criticism among Blacks for his strict policies, McKenzie defended them by publishing excerpts of similar rules and regulations at White universities, including Vanderbilt.⁴⁴

42 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 84.

43 Miller, “To Bring the Race Along Rapidly,” 125.

44 Aptheker, “*The Negro College Student in the 1920s*,” 155.

Although McKenzie's approach to student conduct did become increasingly restrictive throughout the second half of his tenure, Fisk's policies and disciplinary procedures mirrored those at many Black colleges, and McKenzie was "doing nothing not done by black educators."⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, students expressed their dissatisfaction with the strict regulations regardless of institution. In 1914 at Talladega College, a Black institution founded in 1867 by the American Missionary Association, one student was expelled and another two suspended for meeting secretly behind a building. College policy stipulated that members of the opposite sex could visit with each other for only 90 minutes each week, and encounters required supervision. Men and women were permitted to walk to chapel together, but segregated once there. The strict environment led one student to wonder if he was attending one of America's leading colleges or a reform school.⁴⁶ Another commentator referred to the "fascism of Talladega," and the "eternal catering to the southern white establishment."⁴⁷

Howard University, a prominent Black college, forbade students to make statements to the press without consent from the administration, and prohibited single female teachers from marrying. Shortly after McKenzie left Fisk in 1925, students at Howard went on strike to protest, among other things, compulsory chapel attendance.⁴⁸ The protest led to the resignation of Howard's White president, J. Stanley Durkee, amidst

⁴⁵ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 88.

⁴⁶ Maxine D. Jones and Joe M. Richardson, *Talladega College: The First Century* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1990), 85, 93.

⁴⁷ Aptheker, "The Negro College Student in the 1920s," 156.

⁴⁸ Drewry and Doerman, *Stand and Prosper*, 87.

accusations of such things as “arbitrary and dictatorial policy and manner supported by a system of espionage and intimidation,” “violently mishandling of faculty,” and “an open affront and insult to race-pride and respect.”⁴⁹

At Tougaloo College, another institution established by the American Missionary Association, President William Holms believed in “constant enforcement of rules and regulations affecting students.” Female students’ skirts were measured to ensure appropriate length, and a house monitor stood at the exit of the women’s dormitory to enforce the rule. Students caught writing a letter or reading a magazine during study period were disciplined, and students could not receive food sent through the mail from their home. As on most Black campuses, card playing and dancing were prohibited.⁵⁰

At Lincoln University of Missouri, a school founded by Black veterans of the Civil War and designated a land grant institution in 1890, students entered into “a sacred compact to obey all rules...and other rules which the school may promulgate.” In addition to enforcing a strict dress code (all students wore uniforms), University officials could inspect students’ belongings at any time. Interaction among the sexes was prohibited, as was tobacco, alcohol, profanity, and gambling. Each student understood that a “single case of intoxication or gross immorality would....sever his connection to the school.” Students could not return home without written permission from the President, and trips to the local town were prohibited. Sundays were spent attending day-

49 Rayford W. Logan, *Howard University The First Hundred Years 1867-1967*. (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 167, 170, 234.

50 Clarice T. Campbell and Oscar Allan Rogers, Jr. Mississippi: *The View from Tougaloo*. (Jackson, MS, University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 134.

long religious services required of all students. At the end of each year, students anticipated receiving a card of good deportment, and those not receiving a card were not expected to return to campus the following year.⁵¹

Student and alumni protests at Florida A&M College in 1923 plagued the administration of President W.H.A. Howard. Frustrated at the dismissal of former President Nathan B. Young, the students forwarded a petition to College trustees protesting the appointment of Howard. The board chose to ignore the students' petition and, anticipating further student protest, instructed Howard's secretary to inform him "to permit no insubordination or 'striking' among the student body...even if he had to expel the entire student body." The students immediately boycotted classes, and continued their call for Howard's dismissal. Angered at continuing student protests, Howard dismissed eleven students "for the part they played in calling a strike..." His action drove student dissatisfaction underground, and in the next five months fire destroyed the women's dormitory and the mechanical arts building, each under mysterious circumstances.⁵²

Despite student dissatisfaction and protest over campus regulations in the early-to-mid 1920s, policies and discipline on Black campuses changed little over the next 10 years. In 1932, seven years after McKenzie left Fisk, Langston Hughes spent nine months visiting more than fifty Black schools and colleges across the United States and came away alarmed at the lack of personal freedom on most campuses. "To set foot on

51 W. Sherman Savage. *The History of Lincoln University*. (Jefferson City, MO: Lincoln University, 1939), 133-136.

52 Leedell W. Neyland and John W. Riley, *The History of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University*. (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1963), 78-81.

dozens of Negro campuses is like going back to mid-Victorian England, or Massachusetts in the days of the witch-burning Puritans,” Hughes lamented. He cited instances of “twenty-four-year-old men sneaking around...like little boys to take a drag on a forbidden cigarette,” rules against card playing so strict that offenders risked dismissal, and prohibition of dancing at many schools. On some campuses, girls were allowed to dance with girls, but not boys. Hughes observed that many rules sought to keep the sexes separated through restrictions on dating, interpersonal relations, and gender segregation in chapel, and suggested the colleges “rival monasteries and nunneries in their strictness.” He chastised Tuskegee for censoring books on race issues and economics thought “too radical” for students, Hampton and other colleges for not raising a whisper of dissent over egregious White-on-Black violence, and Alcorn College for its draconian method of staggering the release of students from chapel to avoid mixing of the sexes. A disgusted Hughes suggested that most Black colleges “are not trying to make men and women of their students at all – they are doing their best to produce spineless Uncle Toms, uninformed, and full of mental and moral evasion.”⁵³

Fisk’s location in the South amplified the need for strict policies regulating student conduct. White Southern opinion in the first several decades of the twentieth century characterized Blacks as undisciplined, mentally inferior to Whites, prone to violence and vice, and primarily fit for hard labor and agricultural jobs. Most Southern Whites dismissed the need for Black formal education, let alone college training in the liberal arts. Whites worried that education – especially college education – would infuse in Blacks ideas and behavior inconsistent with Southern racial norms. Therefore, most

53 Langston Hughes, “Cowards from the College,” *Crisis* 41, (August, 1934) 226-228.

Black colleges in the South adopted careful and strict oversight and regulation of student behavior to help influence White opinion, win White support, and suppress White animosity and fear toward educated Blacks.

Although McKenzie's personal attitudes on student conduct and discipline transcended race, operationalization of his beliefs dovetailed nicely with Southern expectations, and provided easy targets for critics who conflated his policies with racist motivations. McKenzie understood demonstrating to White constituencies that Fisk students were well-behaved, studious, and respectful of the unique social conditions in the South would help secure for Fisk White support crucial for the University's long-term success. Obtaining White support for Fisk and other Black colleges proved extremely difficult even under the best of circumstances, and if Black student behavior – or, perhaps more accurately, the perception of Black student behavior among Whites – did not meet conform to White expectations, any chance at engendering support would be lost.

Student Conduct and Discipline at Fisk

McKenzie possessed strong convictions regarding discipline and sacrifice, and he believed a University was a reflection of its President. In a revealing letter to Fisk trustee and McKenzie confidant Thomas Jesse Jones that discussed how to communicate Fisk's distinctives in the context of the University's endowment campaign, McKenzie asserted the definition of Fisk must revolve around the leadership and initiatives of its President. Fisk University "must be in large measure expressed in terms of present policies and programs, and they to a considerable extent are necessarily the embodiments of the ideals and determinations of the President." He viewed faculty and staff as an extension of the

President's office, serving as important role models in educating and training students. Optimal learning and development required that students willingly yield to the wisdom, experience, and guidance of their teachers. McKenzie related to Jones his philosophy:

My interpretation is that education involves the standardization of conduct and the filling full of the life and time of the student. Student days are days of hastened development. Student days are the days of submission to the guidance of those who can lead to quicker and better goals than are possibly to purely personal effort. Education is the speeding up of intellectual and character development under and by expert guidance.⁵⁴

McKenzie's focus on student conduct and proscribed daily regimens reflected his belief that students came to college with a variety of habits detrimental to their learning and development. He considered it the job of the University to eliminate their poor conventions and replace them with traits and behaviors that bred success.

It is not reflection on our students to say of them as in a measure we would also say of American students generally that on the whole their environments have tended to create in them habits of dilatoriness, procrastination, inaccuracy, unreliability, rather than those of promptness, speed, accuracy, reliability, thoroughness. The farther we carry them in scholastic lines, the more important the places they are asked to fill, the more critically necessary it is that they shall possess in their very automatic beings the qualities of habit and character which shall make possible the successes to which they aspire. Rigorous standards in routine life even in college days may be as desirable and effective as rigorous standards of exactness in the memorizing of Greek and Latin forms.⁵⁵

McKenzie viewed strict student conduct and discipline as a defining feature of a Fisk education, and he drew a contrast between Fisk's environment and the liberal rules at other, primarily White, institutions. "It is probably true that many of our white

54 McKenzie to Jones, 20 October 1919. LHW Papers, box 18, folder 11.

55 Ibid.

colleges have abandoned the practical guidance of life for their students to unnecessary struggle and strain in the attainment of what the wisdom of the past, born of costly experience, should give to every on-coming generation,” McKenzie proclaimed in his 1924 President’s Report. “Wild voices increasingly fill the air with lamentation over the chaotic motions of modern college youth, but rare is the courage that dares to profit by the wisdom of the centuries.”⁵⁶

Far from apologizing for Fisk’s strict standards as his critics might have liked, McKenzie trumpeted the University’s approach to conduct and discipline – as well as its commitment to high academic standards – as a way to differentiate Fisk from other colleges. He believed Fisk’s strong academic orientation and strict policies attracted the most talented students and thoroughly prepared them for a successful future. “Hampton was unique in its industrial training,” McKenzie asserted, but “...Fisk aspires to be not less unique in its standards and in its life. ...Already we could secure a school of 1000 instead of 500, if we had the dormitory space. But our first duty is not expansion of members, but improvement of service.” His steadfast commitment to standards made some uncomfortable, including a prominent Fisk alumnus and trustee, Dr. William DeBerry. DeBerry wondered to his colleagues during a board of trustees meeting in the 1920s if “whether by any chance the application of these standards was being carried out in too ‘cold blooded’ a manner.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶ President’s Report, *Fisk University News*, January, 1924. Vol. XIV. No. 1. Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 74.

McKenzie sought to position Fisk at the forefront of colleges in the United States, and eagerly communicated his dreams for the University. He announced to Thomas Jesse Jones there are several elements “for which we intend to have no superiors. We aim at preeminence, if preeminence be possible.” In addition to his desire to establish Fisk as an institution academically equal to White colleges in the country, it is revealing, although not surprising, he placed nearly as much importance on policies governing student conduct. He elaborated his priorities for Jones:

1. The highest standards of scholarship regardless of race. We are seeking by constant examination to cut out the hollow shams so frequent in American education – shams which are often laid at the door of Negro schools.
2. Supervision of study is insisted upon. Freshman study at night in a common study hall. Other college students observe the same hours quietly in their several rooms.
3. A definite schedule is maintained for meals and sleep.
4. Economy is emphasized at every point. It is our aim to make the poorest of the poor feel at ease. Simplicity is a requirement.⁵⁸

To achieve the educational environment McKenzie envisioned required Fisk’s trustees to grant McKenzie a certain level of autonomy. For Fisk to take a leadership role in these areas, “it cannot hope to do if it must first secure universal approval of its policies,” McKenzie asserted. He maintained the University “must be financially and morally independent,” and, with his educational agenda in place, “the finest materials will insist on coming to Fisk and the finest product will go forth as graduates from Fisk.”⁵⁹

58 McKenzie to Jones, 20 October 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 11.

59 Ibid.

Despite McKenzie's focus on student conduct, discipline issues became increasingly problematic during 1917-18. In a letter to L. Hollingsworth Wood, Vice-Chairman of the Fisk's board of trustees, McKenzie – in language reflective of the wartime period – recounted a series of particularly troubling events:

The bolsheviki spirit has interfered very seriously with the discipline at the University this year. The boys, particularly, have been frequent in their celebrations during the night. Our Seniors and Juniors made their separate building a place of Bedlam a good deal of the time. A couple of weeks ago they agreed to stop this but they have not kept their word very well and last night they had another very serious explosion. I am recommending to the Prudential Committee this afternoon that two of the Juniors be suspended from the University. The same spirit has penetrated into the girls' dormitory also, if it did not start there, and last night two young men and several young women were scared out of one of the first floor rooms at two o'clock in the morning. ...I hope that we can effect a revolution next year in our discipline.⁶⁰

An opportunity for achieving the "revolution...in discipline" McKenzie desired soon presented itself. In June 1918, McKenzie sought approval from the trustees to use Fisk's campus as a receiving station for Black troops in the Student Army Training Corps during World War I.⁶¹ He informed Wood that accommodating the troops:

...will cramp us very considerably, but the compensation will keep us from any additional indebtedness and probably turn our lodging and boarding department into a self-supporting institution, and enable us to make a number of necessary changes or improvements without cutting into our normal funds. ...I am glad, too, to be of very direct service to the nation in its persecution of the War.⁶²

60 McKenzie to L. Hollingsworth Wood, 30 May 1918, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 5.

61 A precursor to the present-day Reserve Officers' Training Corp (ROTC) program, The Student Army Training Corp (SATC) allowed students to attend school while they participated in military training exercises. Fisk accommodated over 600 Black SATC cadets, many of whom stopped in Nashville temporarily on their way to other schools.

62 McKenzie to Wood, 8 January 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 8.

Wood granted McKenzie's request, and in August 1918 the first of several hundred troops arrived in Nashville.⁶³ The presence of military cadets on Fisk's campus – all of whom were young men – added to the University's disciplinary problems, but the military's strict regimen and discipline appealed to McKenzie. "The boys will live a highly educational military life, centered about Bennett Hall. The girls will live an equally efficient, busy school life, centered about Jubilee Hall," he stated. "This is a time when every patriotic citizen must fall into line and into step without delay and without complaint."⁶⁴ At the opening of the 1918 academic year, he set the tone for a new approach to student conduct by invoking the military's presence and influence on the campus:

We are a military institution. Not that we have been absorbed by the military, but that the essential principles of efficiency exemplified in the military have been absorbed into the university. These principles include concentration of effort, unrelenting toil, elimination of all unnecessary activities and motions, regular and insistent schedule of life, promptness, accuracy, reliability thoroughness, instant and complete obedience.⁶⁵

The mobilization effort only lasted a few months (the War ended in November 1918), but the military presence had lasting effects on Fisk's campus. Although McKenzie appreciated the disciplinary focus of the military's proscribed daily routine, he

63 McKenzie letter to H.H. Furlong, LHW Papers, box 21, folder 14.1 McKenzie informed Furlong that nearly 600 troops were on campus.

64 Letter from McKenzie reprinted in the *Fisk University News*, September 1918, 9, No. 1. Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN.

65 *Fisk University News*, October 1918, 9, No. 2., 18., Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN. Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and The Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 250. Summers used the quote to demonstrate that McKenzie sought to mold Black youth "into acquiescent cogs in the machine of industrial and corporate capitalism." Summers failed to situate McKenzie's remark in the context of Fisk's SATC initiative, and characterized McKenzie's approach toward discipline as a "martial spirit of pedagogy."

harshly criticized the military's refusal to acknowledge and abide by Fisk's rules and regulations. With military leaders unwilling to enforce "satisfactory moral standards," their cadets ran rampant, smoking, cursing, and fraternizing with Fisk co-eds. In one significant infraction, a soldier helped a female Fisk student to "escape supervision" of the University and was found with her in a private room. Although the man was arrested, the military administered no punishment. "Institutions that have always held that immorality meant instant expulsion have been debarred the right to maintain their rule and have been obliged to hold their tongue while the military have tempted the youth by prophylactic treatments to enter upon careers of vice," McKenzie angrily proclaimed. "Whatever be the wisdom of such treatments in a regular army camp, it has no excuse on a college campus."⁶⁶

While he appreciated the military tenants of structure and discipline, McKenzie felt as an institution the military sometimes flouted society's moral code. "By the very constitution of man and society, the military organization cannot be an end in itself, but is the instrument of those other ideas, ideals, and purposes which rank higher in the university of God," he wrote in the *Fisk News*. "Force must ever be the servant of intelligence and conscience, of morality and religion, or it becomes satanic and self-destructive."⁶⁷ In addition to the poor behavior of cadets, McKenzie strongly criticized the federal government for failing to provide Black soldiers adequate compensation for

66 McKenzie to Hollingsworth Wood, 8 January 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 8. Shortly after the incident, an angry Wood sent a telegram to Frederick P. Keppel, Third Assistant Secretary of War, stating the incident "makes a serious situation at Fisk University with large girl student body. Is any relief possible from Military side?" Wood to Keppel, 9 December 1918, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 7. *Fisk University News*, December 1918, 9, No. 4, 20., Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN.

67 Ibid.

their service to the nation. “When the immediate aim of efficient fighters was no longer its aim, the Government sought to free itself from its financial obligations and forgot what havoc it would work in the lives of many, many young men,” McKenzie lamented in the *Fisk News*. “A moral obligation kept would in the long run have proved a national gain. Thousands, disappointed and demoralized, have gone out permanently indifferent to the higher types of opportunity.” Given the fallout of Fisk’s mobilization experience, McKenzie had no interest in establishing a permanent ROTC unit on campus.⁶⁸

Despite Fisk’s tumultuous experience with the mobilization effort, McKenzie sought to continue at Fisk one aspect of the military’s model of conduct. “I would like to call your attention,” he wrote Wood, “to the fact that the military having established compulsory supervised study, it seemed wise to me – and apparently wise to the Faculty – to continue the experiment.”⁶⁹ The continuation of strict student conduct policies following the military’s departure from campus angered Fisk students. Viewing the new policies as infringing on their rights, several Fisk students rebelled. McKenzie briefed Wood about the episode:

The other day the college boys served notice on me that until I was inclined to treat them like men they would refuse to attend the study hall. It did not take very many hours to secure written pledges from all but five of them that they would attend. Since then, one or more of them have attempted to spoil the lights in the study hall, and they have torn down the picture of President Cravath and written an ugly message on the chapel wall where the picture was.⁷⁰

68 *Fisk University News*, January 1919, 9, No. 4, 4-5., Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN.

69 McKenzie to Wood, 8 January 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 8.

70 Ibid.

McKenzie informed Wood the required study hall also angered certain Fisk alumni, remarking “Only last night I was sent almost direct word to the effect that the alumni would protest against the study hall, and a reminder of the fact that practically no white man is trusted by any Negro. This came from one of our mildest spoken alumni, a preacher who lives across the road from the University.”⁷¹

Growing student frustration over McKenzie’s policies had festered on campus for some time, and the student rebellion over Fisk’s mandatory study hall underscored this dissatisfaction. The techniques McKenzie used to foster character-building and sacrifice created resentment among Fisk students and alumni, and sowed the initial seeds of discontent that led to more public criticisms of his administration by W.E.B. DuBois in 1924, and the Fisk student strike in 1925.

When McKenzie arrived in Nashville in 1915, he took over an institution beset by severe financial challenges. In addition to raising funds, McKenzie immediately focused on economizing functions across the institution to save money. As part of his plan, he decided to suspend the student newspaper, the *Fisk Herald*, and merge it with Fisk’s alumni publication, the *Fisk University News*. Although critics at the time – including W.E.B. DuBois – and contemporary historians cite McKenzie’s decision as an example of his desire to suppress student criticism, no evidence suggests that sinister motives drove McKenzie’s action. Rather, the *Herald* had been in debt for some time prior to McKenzie’s arrival, and he believed that “the *News* and *Herald* can do better service than perhaps either at the present time could do alone.” Professor Alphonse D. Philipppse, a

71 Ibid.

vocal critic of McKenzie's administration, suggested McKenzie's decision was not his own. "When the President [McKenzie] came to this campus," Philippse wrote after he left Fisk, "he was told that the *Fisk Herald* was so deeply in debt that it could not proceed."⁷² McKenzie outlined his plan for the merger in the *Fisk News* and, in an effort that underscored the economic motivation of the decision, declared the *News* would assume the existing debt of the *Herald* if two hundred undergraduates subscribed to the *News* at a annual cost of 50 cents. The combined publication would feature a regular "Student Department" under editorial management of the old *Herald* board.⁷³

Student dissatisfaction also extended to prohibition of Greek societies on campus, although student interest in social organizations predated McKenzie's arrival. Fisk officials debated the issue in 1915, and agreed to ban "fraternities and other secret or oath-bound societies" because the trustees believed such organizations did not reflect the democratic ideals taught at the University and could lead to inappropriate student conduct. Organizations not exclusive in their membership – including debating, literary, and other academic societies – were allowed.⁷⁴

72 Philippse to Wood, LHW Papers, box 23, folder 18. For many Fisk alumni, the *Herald* was an important historical symbol of literary freedom. Begun in 1883, the newspaper soon became a platform on which Fisk students advocated equal rights while openly criticizing actions intended to deny those rights. As a former editor of the *Herald* in the 1880s, W.E.B DuBois had a special affection for the newspaper. Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 48.

73 *Fisk University News*, December 1915, 6, No. 3, 23, Fisk University Special Archives, Nashville, TN. In announcing the plan, McKenzie asked alumni if they wished the publication sent to them "entirely without charge, or do they prefer to subscribe to it?" In a strategy to raise funds – if not sympathy over the cost of publishing and mailing the *News* – McKenzie suggested if the "Alumni would like to create a Living Endowment Fund by subscribing two dollars or more per year to such a fund," they would receive the *News* "free of extra charge."

74 Fisk University, Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, 9 November 1915, Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN.

Scholars often ascribe the trustees' action to ban Greek societies as one of McKenzie's policies, perhaps because the board's decision occurred at a board meeting held during McKenzie's inauguration. Still, McKenzie fully supported the trustees' decision and worked to uphold the policy. On several occasions during McKenzie's presidency fraternity representatives interested in establishing chapters at Fisk visited the institution and were turned away. When in 1921 the *Crisis* reported that Omega Psi Phi planned to hold its ninth annual convention at Fisk's campus, McKenzie wrote George E. Haynes in Washington asking the prominent and well-connected Fisk alumnus to procure names of Fisk students involved in the fraternity.⁷⁵

McKenzie's aversion to Greek societies and other non-academic extra curricular activities reflected his philosophy of collegiate education. College was a time to study, not to engage in frivolous activities, and organizations and activities that promoted an elitist mentality among students did not belong on Fisk's campus. McKenzie sought to promote an egalitarian campus environment, and many of his policies, including proscribed student dress, oversight of students' spending money, and discouragement of any sort of extravagance were designed, in part, to help Fisk's significant population of poor students feel as comfortable and welcome as students from wealthy families.⁷⁶

As college and professional sports gained greater exposure in the 1910s and began to capture broad American interest, Fisk students started agitating for greater

75 McKenzie to Haynes, 4 January 1921, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 13.

76 McKenzie proclaimed in a University brochure describing life at Fisk and its rules and regulations that, "The uniform and compulsory practice of economy which makes the poorest of the poor comfortable in every part of our campus life is a feature which should continue to signalize the democracy we profess." Fisk University, *The Institution and the Creed*. (Nashville, TN: The Hemphill Press, 1921). LHW Papers, Fisk McKenzie Papers.

opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics. Because of the additional responsibility related to hosting on campus hundreds of military troops, difficulties in raising money, and the lack of an instructor in physical education, McKenzie eliminated most Fisk intercollegiate athletic teams in 1918, but reinstated them in 1919. Despite generally strong athletic teams – Fisk’s football team was self-proclaimed the “champions of the South” in 1919 – Fisk officials remained apprehensive about intercollegiate athletics, and Fisk students complained about the lack of an athletic conference affiliation.

Historians consider McKenzie’s ambivalence over intercollegiate athletics as further evidence of his desire to suppress student extracurricular activity.⁷⁷ Like other aspects of his administration, McKenzie’s attitude toward intercollegiate athletics is less about sinister motives and more reflective of his philosophy of collegiate education. Although never a strong supporter of intercollegiate athletics – believing their pursuit not conducive to promoting an atmosphere of education, discipline, and student character – McKenzie enthusiastically supported physical education as part of the curriculum.⁷⁸ He encouraged physical activity among students, and preferred students participate in intramural athletics instead of organized athletics.

Scandals involving college athletics in the early 1920s concerned McKenzie, with widespread reports about gambling, use of professional players, and cheating. President

⁷⁷ Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*; Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville;” Wolters, *A New Negro*.

⁷⁸ McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, undated letter, but likely from 1917. The majority of McKenzie’s letter is an appeal to Jones for permission to hire a director of physical education. LHW Papers, box 18, folder 3.

J.L. Peacock of Shaw University informed McKenzie that Howard University provided tuition scholarships for its athletes and “hired” them from other universities. Peacock added that gambling at the annual Howard-Lincoln football game was notorious.⁷⁹ McKenzie viewed excess in intercollegiate athletics as another example of an activity incompatible with the academically disciplined environment he wished to create at Fisk.

Fearful that black colleges would endure “the whole disgraceful career of white athletics,” McKenzie resisted student and alumni demands to expand Fisk’s intercollegiate programs during his administration, as he valued character development as more important than wins and losses. In recounting a Fisk football game, he took greater pleasure in how Fisk’s players conducted themselves after the contest than their performance on the field:

We lost the game with Morehouse on Thanksgiving Day with a score of six to nothing on a very watery field, but our students proved true sportsmen and were exceedingly courteous of the team after the game and permitted them to light the bonfire which was prepared for celebration that night.⁸⁰

Although at various times McKenzie spoke with the trustees and faculty about eliminating Fisk’s athletic programs, he privately expressed to Thomas Jesse Jones he had “never committed...to the idea of ending intercollegiate athletics.” Events in late 1921, however, provided a stark example of the corrupting influences associated with intercollegiate sports, and galvanized influential Fisk faculty in support of ending Fisk’s intercollegiate athletic programs. After Fisk’s football team claimed victory over

⁷⁹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 158.

⁸⁰ McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, 26 November 1921. McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 16.

Wilberforce, the defeated team's players issued a statement picked up by the *Chicago Defender* claiming the officiating was unfair, and Wilberforce deserved to win the game. The players further accused Fisk of being "inhospitable and discourteous" during their time on campus. On their return train to Louisville, team members created a disturbance that resulted in several players' arrests and fines of \$150 to cover damages. McKenzie later learned Wilberforce contacted a Fisk player not allowed to play in the game, offered him a free education if he attended Wilberforce, and the student subsequently transferred.⁸¹

Shortly after the Wilberforce incident, Professor John W. Work, who oversaw Fisk's Jubilee Singers, told McKenzie he thought "students were too crazy over football," and he "would openly advocate the taking away entirely of intercollegiate athletics." Another Fisk faculty member suggested that "intramural athletics were the only kind to encourage," and immediately called a meeting of the athletic committee to discuss whether Fisk should continue offering intercollegiate athletics.⁸² Although several faculty approved eliminating Fisk's sports programs, McKenzie never pursued such action.⁸³ Still, concerned about the unsavory influence of intercollegiate athletics at Fisk, McKenzie mandated that athletes receive no special treatment, and he prohibited athletic scholarships. He also urged the board of trustees to require all athletes complete one year of study and maintain sufficient academic progress prior to their participation in

81 Ibid.

82 McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, 26 November 1921. Fisk McKenzie Papers, box 3, folder 16.

83 McKenzie eliminated intercollegiate baseball in 1922 and the track and field team the following year.

intercollegiate athletics, an idea that in later decades was adopted by most White and Black colleges.

McKenzie's suspension of the student newspaper, conservative approach toward intercollegiate athletics, abolition of student government, and refusal to allow Greek societies on Fisk's campus are cited by scholars as evidence of McKenzie's autocratic policies and desire to suppress Black uplift.⁸⁴ When evaluated more fully in the context of McKenzie's educational philosophy and Fisk's history and precarious financial situation, these actions are hardly surprising – rather, they align with Fisk's historical tradition and McKenzie's commitment to developing character and sacrifice among Fisk students.

The Fisk Creed

In 1921, McKenzie published a small leaflet simply titled, the "Fisk Creed." Written by McKenzie as important information for "young men and young women who are students or expect to become students in Fisk University," the Creed articulated Fisk's approach to education and its policies for student behavior and conduct. Perhaps published partly as a response to persistent disciplinary problems, the Creed married Fisk's strong Christian heritage with McKenzie's philosophy of collegiate education and student conduct and development. The Creed focused on "the four chief elements of our philosophy at Fisk," including Health, Organized Life, Economy, and Thoroughness, with "character and scholarship...the objects of our desires." McKenzie anticipated that in following the Creed's policies, Fisk students will "prove that the Negro student can

84 Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South*; Lamon, "The Black Community in Nashville;" Wolters, *A New Negro*.

accept the grinding process of rigid training, and emerge to stand in even competition in the intellectual world.” In nearly every respect, the Creed reflected McKenzie’s ideal educational environment – one that required high academic standards, promoted Christian character and morality, regulated and enforced student conduct and discipline, and eschewed campus activities that negatively impacted students’ singular focus on scholarship.⁸⁵

Most important among of the four elements of the Creed was living a life of economy, as its manifestation impacted most aspects of University life. McKenzie used the concept of frugality to promote egalitarianism among Fisk’s student body. While many Fisk students came from impoverished backgrounds, some came from privileged families, and McKenzie wished to suppress as much as possible circumstances that could create elitist cliques and groups on campus. According to the Creed, “The uniform and compulsory practice of economy which makes the poorest of the poor comfortable in every part of our campus life is a feature which should continue to signalize the democracy we profess.” True to the democratic ideal, Fisk “must continue to be a place where everyone is economical, and where no groups or individuals shall stand apart from the rest, or have any opportunities or privileges not common to all.” Pursuing “democratic simplicity” precluded the formation of Greek societies and certain other groups on Fisk’s campus. Although a highly controversial policy, especially as it related to Greek life, prohibition of exclusive campus organizations assured that “every

85 Fisk University, *The Institution and the Creed*. LHW Papers, box 21, folder 12.

opportunity possible shall be provided by philanthropy for all the students alike in the way of buildings and every other facility and equipment.”⁸⁶

Apart from helping democratize the student body, McKenzie believed that a life of economy helped promote personal discipline and integrity. “Frugality and thrift are prime essentials of character. To be extravagant at Fisk is to violate every worthy ideal of the University,” stated the Creed. Fisk students were expected to focus on their intellectual development and eschew flashy expressions of personal interest. “The high costs of college life elsewhere are found in clothes and other personal expenditures largely for show and frivolity,” noted the Creed. “If the great mass of worthy poor are to have intellectual privileges at Fisk it will be necessary to continue the rigid control which almost eliminates the expenditures for adornments, flowers, banquets, receptions, dances, fraternities, etc.”⁸⁷

McKenzie’s training in sociology and his background with Indians sensitized him to the importance of healthy living and hygiene, especially for minority populations who often lived in conditions not conducive to good health. “Health is the basic condition of civic usefulness,” proclaimed the Creed. “It is the resultant of three sets of forces, namely: (1) Heredity, (2) Environment, (3) Conduct.” McKenzie maintained that for college age students, health is “largely a matter of personal conduct,” believing that “heredity that cannot be overcome, and the environment that cannot be controlled, form but one-ninth of the importance of personal conduct.” As a result, he instituted at Fisk a curricular focus on physical fitness and hygiene, with every student in high school grades

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

through the second year of college engaging in physical exercise at least once per day. “Physical vigor is an inestimable asset in the struggle for education as it is in the struggle for life,” asserted the Creed, and it proclaimed that “All of our students will be missionaries of hygiene.”⁸⁸

McKenzie’s attention to physical fitness did not extend, of course, to intercollegiate athletics. He believed that sanctioned sports at Fisk did not promote appropriate student conduct, and undermined campus discipline. Consistent with McKenzie’s focus on fiscal prudence and campus democracy, the Creed supported “reform in athletics and intercollegiate relationships,” and maintained that Fisk is “discovering that athletics for everybody provides the material for winning teams.” The Creed suggested physical fitness among all students would lift student morale, and the physical department will help “put joy and meaning into the leisure hours and the casual duties of student life. Its very discipline spells not only morale but morality and character for our campus life.”⁸⁹

Aiding in the pursuit of Economy and Health was the third element of the Fisk Creed, an Organized Life. McKenzie believed that students’ daily activities needed strict structure and supervision. “It is not merely enough to open the doors of the classroom and let the students succeed or fail as their own caprice, or even their own judgment shall determine,” the Creed stated. “If guidance and control can save the student from present mistaken inclination and provides for his future and permanent good, the University has a solemn duty to perform.” Indeed, close oversight of students’ daily regimen offered

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

opportunities for early intervention in matters of academics and conduct, especially among weaker students. Consonant with McKenzie's democratic philosophy, the Creed stated that "The protection of the weak would alone justify the restrictions placed upon those who think they are strong."⁹⁰

Focus on academic achievement required "that time must be properly ordered, and properly distributed" with energies "wisely conserved and correctly directed," and "interest concentrated." To achieve these objectives "for a large campus family at minimum costs to both students and faculty, a highly organized routine of life becomes necessary." Hours were set for daily activities such as meals, sleep, recitations, and study periods, and attendance at weekly chapel and religious services required. Interactions between the sexes were carefully regulated and supervised, and girls were "carefully chaperoned." Strict routines protected students "from themselves" and helped direct conservation of "every physical and moral strength" so students can "survive the scholastic tests which are put upon them." In addition to promoting academic focus, daily routines taught the lessons of "regularity, promptness, reliability, continuity, and thoroughness," which are fundamental attributes of "good citizenship and...moral and religious character."⁹¹

Thoroughness represented the final element of the Creed. In his work with Indians, McKenzie bemoaned the discrepancy of standards among Whites and Indians and believed lesser requirements retarded Indian development and furthered White

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

perceptions of Indian inferiority. McKenzie argued by setting and enforcing similar standards Indians would demonstrate an ability on par with Whites. He brought the same attitude to his work at Fisk. The Creed asserted that “Perhaps to be honest and thorough with our classwork is as difficult a task as we face. It is so much easier to be ‘sympathetic.’ Superficiality and rhetoric and laxity ruin much in American education.” Fisk’s commitment to thoroughness and high academic standards meant that students not properly prepared to enter the University needed to repeat subjects in which their knowledge proved insufficient. McKenzie recognized such a practice may cause “bitter feeling sometimes on the part of the students,” but in the long run should enhance their appreciation for “an honest education.”⁹²

Students arriving at Fisk were “sifted” based on their scholastic aptitude, and placed in classes commensurate with their ability. At the end of each quarter they were reclassified based on their performance. By minimizing the bi-modal distribution of academic ability within classes, course instructors could more effectively target the learning needs of students and help ensure that Fisk graduates could “compete on an even basis in the most rigid colleges of the land.”⁹³

McKenzie anticipated criticism of Fisk’s strict campus environment, but dismissed such rhetoric. “The fact that some of our institutions feel no sense of responsibility along some of these lines is no necessary argument against the Fisk policy,” stated the Creed. Rather, Fisk’s policies are “desired by most parents,” are

92 Ibid.

93 Ibid.

“tolerable to most students,” and “admirable...in the eyes of the general public.”

Although an excessive characterization, the Creed also claimed that Fisk’s policies were so popular they are “one of the two or three chief reasons why we cannot meet the requests for admission.” The Creed suggested that students not interested in abiding by its tenants should look elsewhere, declaring, “Those not content to live the simple and plain life owe it to other Fisk students to go elsewhere where larger expenditures are morally justifiable.”⁹⁴

McKenzie expected Fisk’s faculty and staff to model the behavior demanded of its students. In 1920, he made a bold and mildly controversial decision by asking for and receiving the resignations of Cornelius W. Morrow, Dean of the University, and a longtime Fisk faculty member who had served as part of the University’s leadership team between 1912-1914, and the Dean of Women, Ella Brown. In a letter to Hollingsworth Wood, McKenzie admitted the “almost continuous antagonism on the part of those persons to me and to the policies of the institution,” caused in part by, “a nauseating love affair...[that] for several months aroused the ridicule and indignation of students and community.” He indicated that “endeavors to persuade them to put this out of sight have failed and the storm has suddenly broken.”⁹⁵ Recognizing the importance of handling the matter discretely, McKenzie made arrangements for Morrow to retire from his post as Dean, granted him a full pension, allowed him to escort the Jubilee Singers on their tour of the Pacific Coast, and suggested that “it will still be possible for you to serve the

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ McKenzie to Wood, 10 March 1920, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 12.

University in other than teaching capacities...and it shall seem wise and efficient from time to time to call upon you for your service.”⁹⁶

Pursuit of Higher Academic Standards and Accreditation

During his work with the Society of American Indians, Fayette McKenzie urged members to settle for nothing less than that expected of any White man. McKenzie took the same approach with Blacks, and sought to create at Fisk academic programs that rivaled those at any White college in the United States. Fisk historian Joe Richardson wrote that, “As soon as McKenzie arrived at Fisk he began to talk about scholarship and improving standards.”⁹⁷ George E. Haynes, a Fisk alumus and then-Executive Director of the National Urban League, remarked to L. Hollingsworth Wood shortly after McKenzie’s arrival that the new president was committed to, “those high ideals of scholarship and character” which had always characterized Fisk.⁹⁸ McKenzie recognized that strong scholarship and academic quality facilitated recognition and respect of Black scholars, and enhanced Fisk’s reputation and status among Blacks, Whites, and industrial philanthropists. Moreover, ensuring high standards and scholarship helped Fisk gain recognition among prestigious northern colleges and their administrators, educational organizations, and accrediting agencies.

Raising Fisk’s academic standards required capable and committed faculty, and attracting strong teachers to the campus proved difficult. Teaching salaries were embarrassingly low, and White instructors often suffered ridicule and ostracism by many

⁹⁶ McKenzie to C.W. Morrow, 25 March 1920, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 12.

⁹⁷ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 73.

⁹⁸ As quoted in Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 72.

in the white Nashville community.⁹⁹ A former college instructor himself, McKenzie lamented the sacrifices faculty endured to teach at Fisk, and from the beginning of his presidency sought funds to provide modest but important financial enhancements for faculty.¹⁰⁰

At the end of the nineteenth century, higher education underwent significant change and expansion. Development and growth of new academic disciplines combined with an expanding diversity of institutions, including normal schools, junior colleges, technical schools, and professional schools. The burgeoning educational landscape led to broad shifts in curricula that included growth of elective courses and slow erosion of the classical curriculum. The sudden growth contributed to a confusing array of institutional distinctions, acceptance standards, transfer regulations, and degree completion requirements, a situation made more complex by rapid expansion of K-12 education.

To help provide order and establish consistent standards among colleges, professional associations began to accredit institutions in their discipline, including the Association of American Law Schools (1900), the Society of Foresters (1900), and the American Osteopathic Association (1897). Beset by accusations that several medical schools granted bogus medical degrees and credentials, in 1905 the American Medical

99 In 1920, the “normal range” of teaching salaries at Fisk was \$500 - \$1,600, or \$5,700 - \$18,200 in 2010 dollars. According to McKenzie, “fifty of our staff average an almost even \$1,000,” or \$11,400 in 2010 dollars. McKenzie to General Education Board, 16 January 1920, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1274.

100 In a February 1915 memo to the Board of Trustees written a few weeks after he accepted the Fisk’s Presidency, McKenzie bluntly stated: “To do the work that will put Fisk in the real leadership of Negro education, it will be necessary to strengthen the teaching staff, especially by the addition of highly trained, highly capable men to the Faculty. This will mean better salaries than are now paid.” McKenzie to The Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 8 February 1915, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1272. McKenzie sent the report to Thomas Jesse Jones, who advanced it to Wallace Buttrick a few days prior to McKenzie’s meeting with board. Jones told Buttrick: “I am eager that you may see the attitude which he [McKenzie] is taking toward his responsibilities as the future president of Fisk.” Jones to Buttrick, 5 February 1915, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1272.

Association (AMA) published a classification of medical schools based on criteria that ranged from licensure examination failures to inspections of each school. Schools were categorized as approved, on probation, or unapproved. Protest by institutions not fully approved compromised professional perceptions of the findings, and soon led to an influential follow-up study coordinated independently of the AMA. Funded by the newly established Carnegie Foundation, Abraham Flexner conducted the study. Flexner visited every medical school in the United States and his findings, published in 1910, largely corroborated the AMA's previous effort. Flexner's report received widespread acclaim and precipitated the closure of several institutions the report cited as inferior. By 1915 the number of medical schools in operation had fallen 40 percent.¹⁰¹

In 1895, the North Central Association (NCA) was formed, the country's first regional accrediting organization. In 1912, the Association announced 12 criteria for accreditation, and the following year published the first annual list of fully accredited colleges and universities. The NCA's influential list of criteria heralded the movement to define colleges and universities by specific, factual, and uniform measures, a development that increased pressure on Black colleges to raise standards.¹⁰² Soon after, other regional accrediting organizations formed, including the Southern Association (1917), Middle States Association (1919), and Northwest Association (1923).

With the success of Abraham Flexner's survey of medical education, educational leaders and philanthropists called for a similar study of Black education. Proponents

101 Fred F. Harclerod, "Accreditation: History, Process, and Problems," AAHE-ERIC Higher Education Research Report, no.6 (Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1980), 21-23.

102 Anderson, "Philanthropic Control Over Private Black Higher Education," 147.

suggested that, like the medical school report, a comprehensive analysis of Black institutions would help eliminate corruption and provide objective evaluations to inform public policy and philanthropic funding decisions. Thomas Jesse Jones, a good friend of McKenzie, future Fisk trustee, and specialist in the Bureau of Education, directed the study, which began in 1913 and was prepared in cooperation with the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Using Flexner's methodology as a model, agents visited "every institution of any importance," including primary schools through colleges, and larger schools "were studied by three or four persons." The scope of analysis included several dimensions, including mission, ownership and control, enrollment, faculty and staff, organization and curriculum, financial management, and physical plant.¹⁰³

As part of the study, representatives visited Fisk on three separate occasions, the last shortly after McKenzie's inauguration in November 1915. The completed study was published to widespread acclaim in two volumes, and the findings noted a "striking unanimity" among educators that Fisk and Howard were the two Black colleges most qualified for further development as universities. The report cited Fisk's facilities, Christian ideals, location within a one day journey of four million Blacks, and "progressive management" as the necessary foundation for further development. The report also noted Fisk's relations with the White Nashville community were cordial, which helped foster a "sympathetic appreciation" for Southern Black problems. Finally,

103 Report on Negro Education, 1917.

the study recommended that Fisk “be adequately financed so that it may strengthen its work as a central institution for college training and social service.”¹⁰⁴

Although criticized by several Black leaders, including W.E.B. DuBois, who believed it marginalized Black education by advocating educational consolidation, the report’s release shortly after McKenzie’s arrival in Nashville provided the new President a strong rationale to improve Fisk’s standards and scholarship, which McKenzie eagerly embraced. In McKenzie’s first three years at Fisk, he added several new academic departments, including Journalism, Spanish, and Applied Economics, which consisted of courses in accounting, banking, business law, and insurance. He also enlarged and strengthened several existing departments, including English, political science, and religion, and instituted a system of majors.¹⁰⁵

Just as important as the rationale it provided to enhance and expand curriculum, the study of Black education provided a respected, third-party endorsement of Fisk’s operations, which was instrumental in directing resources toward the University.

Foundation and philanthropic executives studied the report to help determine funding

104 Ibid.

105 Addie Sweet, document titled “Academic Standards.” 10 April 1925, LHW Papers, box 23, folder 19.3. The document outlines academic accomplishments during McKenzie’s administration. Sweet was a Fisk faculty member from 1907 – 1927 and sympathetic to McKenzie’s administration. She likely drafted the document for the Greater Fisk Committee during their investigation of student grievances against McKenzie. In 1960, Sweet wrote McKenzie’s successor, Thomas Elsa Jones (who served as Fisk President from 1926-1946), about Paul H. Davis’s “John D. Rockefeller’s Greatest Gift,” which was published in *Reader’s Digest* in 1960. Sweet complained about the “unfavorable light the article casts upon the McKenzie administration,” and referenced accomplishments of McKenzie’s administration, noting it was “a great privilege to have been associated with Dr. McKenzie for ten years in the work at Fisk.” Sweet’s letter to Jones – written after McKenzie’s death and 32 years after she left Fisk – demonstrates the strong and authentic support McKenzie engendered among some faculty and staff. Sweet to Jones, 8 November 1960, McKenzie TSLA Papers, folder 7, frame 746.

decisions, and administrators at White colleges referenced the report when graduates from Black institutions applied to their graduate schools.

Despite the study's favorable review of Fisk, it had little impact on the University's success in gaining accreditation from regional accrediting organizations. The agencies still looked at Black higher education as somewhat of an oxymoron, and resisted acknowledging Black institutions as equal in educational quality as White universities. It would take nearly two more decades – until 1931 – for the Southern Association to accredit Black schools, at which time Fisk was the first Black college to receive accreditation from the organization.

With the path toward regional accreditation effectively blocked, McKenzie pursued other options to demonstrate Fisk's academic quality was consistent with that of most White colleges and universities. His focus on attracting better teachers, ensuring more effective instruction, and maintaining high standards of achievement began to pay dividends for Fisk. In 1922, the University of Chicago recognized Fisk as a standard college, and a year later Columbia University awarded Fisk the same status. The recognition was important to Fisk's growing reputation, and meant Fisk graduates no longer needed to complete additional coursework prior to acceptance to the graduate schools at Chicago and Columbia. Further recognition perhaps more important to the University – and gratifying for McKenzie – came when the Carnegie Foundation selected Fisk as an “associate” institution. The Carnegie recognition provided Fisk widespread visibility as a standard college, and also granted Fisk faculty access to a teacher pension system McKenzie deemed important. McKenzie formally applied for associate status in

April 1921, and in approving Fisk's request Carnegie Chairman Henry S. Pritchett noted it is with, "great pleasure to welcome to the list of institutions associated with the Foundation a university for negroes whose standards of work entitled the institution to this recognition."¹⁰⁶

When he arrived at Fisk, McKenzie sought to assure a certain level of financial security for retirees of the University, as Fisk's low salaries precluded much, if any, saving for retirement. As a Carnegie associate institution, the Foundation granted \$25,000 to Fisk to produce an annual income of \$2,500 "to be set aside as an endowment to be used by the University in the provision of old age annuities for its teachers," provided Fisk set aside \$50,000 that, when added to the Carnegie Funds, would be used for the same purpose.¹⁰⁷

Financial assistance from the General Education Board as part of their campaign to improve college teaching, and the Carnegie Foundation's recognition of Fisk an associate institution led to dramatic increases in teacher compensation at the University. In 1919-20, salaries for instruction at Fisk totaled \$48,210. With receipt of the Rosenwald and GEB funds the following year, the total jumped to \$70,080, an increase of 45 percent.¹⁰⁸ In 1924-25, Fisk budgeted \$92,643 for faculty salaries, a 92 percent increase over six years. Interestingly, increases in administrative salaries in dollar and

¹⁰⁶ Pritchett to McKenzie, 16 May 1921, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 13.

¹⁰⁷ Pritchett to McKenzie, 16 May 1921, LHW Papers, box 19, folder 13.; Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 19 October 1921, LHW Papers, box 21, folder 11.

¹⁰⁸ McKenzie to W.W. Brierley, 10 October 1922, GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1275.

percentage terms over the same period paled in comparison, increasing from \$12,930 in 1919-20 to a budgeted amount of \$18,950 in 1924-25.¹⁰⁹

McKenzie's effort to increase faculty salaries, secure a pension plan for retirees, and contain administrative expenses helped dramatically improve Fisk's faculty resources and instruction, which he viewed as a prerequisite to the quality scholarship and high standards he sought for Fisk. McKenzie's efforts brought new recognition to Fisk both in and outside the Academy, and embodied the vision he articulated in his inauguration speech in 1915, when he issued to colleagues and students the challenge: "Let us dare to be a University!"¹¹⁰

Community Engagement

With his background in sociology and interest in social work, McKenzie enjoyed working with communities to address social issues. The year he spent teaching on the Shoshoni Indian Reservation in Wyoming led to several recommendations to improve Indian affairs and living conditions on reservations. At Ohio State, McKenzie quickly involved himself in Columbus' city affairs, became active in the public recreation and settlement house movements, and served on various municipal organizational boards and committees.

McKenzie brought the same attitude and enthusiasm toward community involvement to his role at Fisk, and shortly after his arrival began lobbying the City of Nashville to open city parks to Fisk students and other Black residents, and end

109 Fayette McKenzie, Report titled "To the Board of Trustees of Fisk University." 1 January 1925, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 18, folder 1.

110 Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 74.; Wolters, *A New Negro*, 30.

segregated seating arrangements in Nashville auditoriums. In his role with the State Council of Social Agencies, McKenzie fought to obtain similar arrangements for delinquent Black youth as were granted to White youth, and requested the State create a vocational school for wayward Black girls.¹¹¹

McKenzie viewed Fisk and its students as important resources for the White and Black Nashville communities, and the Nashville Fire of 1916 provided evidence of Fisk's positive impact on Nashville. On 21 March 1916, just a few months after McKenzie's inauguration, a large fire swept through the east side of the city. Abated by unusually strong winds and wooden-shingle roofs, the fire destroyed in just over four hours nearly every structure in a two block wide, two mile long stretch of the city. Over 600 homes and businesses were consumed in the blaze, thousands were left homeless, and nearly half the affected residents were Black. Demonstrating that "human sympathy and helpfulness...stops not for racial barriers," Fisk students and staff threw themselves into the aid effort. Under the leadership of Dr. George E. Haynes, who directed Fisk's Department of Social Science, Fiskites applied a systematic approach to investigating needs, tallying records, and distributing relief. The entire senior class aided in the effort, and along with Haynes "succeeded in winning the confidence of workers of both races." McKenzie took justifiable pride in Fisk's response, noted the "hearty co-operation"

¹¹¹ Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 78.

among the races, the scientific basis on which Haynes and the students carried out their work, and proclaimed “expert Negro aid are worthy of special recognition.”¹¹²

McKenzie envisioned several opportunities for Fisk to engage with Nashville’s Black community and the broader South, and he outlined his recommendations in a report to the trustees in early February 1915, just a few weeks after he accepted the board’s offer to become President. His report offered several ideas “of the duty of Fisk to its immediate community and to the southland at large.” Given McKenzie’s sociological background, he was “especially interested in the social service and wide-spreading extension activities” being coordinated by Professor George E. Haynes. Yet, beyond that important work, McKenzie considered it Fisk’s “great duty” to “train the teachers for [black] secondary and elementary schools,” including continuing education courses for current teachers. Believing that great work could be done during the summer months, when current teachers were available to come to campus, McKenzie informed the trustees “if it be feasible I should like to plan to start a summer session of Fisk University beginning in June 1916.”¹¹³

McKenzie’s early priority to establish a comprehensive summer school program to help train Black teachers from schools throughout the South aligned well with Fisk’s strengths. The University enjoyed the best reputation among all Black colleges for its teacher training programs, and McKenzie viewed a summer school program as an

112 Fayette McKenzie, “Race Co-Operation,” *Fisk University News*, May, 1916, 6, No. 8, 7-8. McKenzie summed up the outreach effort as “one to elicit the gratitude of those who believe in wise philanthropy and proper race relations.”

113 Fayette McKenzie, Letter to Board of Trustees, 8 February 1915, enclosure with a letter from Thomas Jessie Jones to Wallace Buttrick, 5 February 1915. GEB Papers, series 1.1, box 138, folder 1272.

opportunity to enhance education in Black primary and secondary schools and showcase Fisk to the teachers who attended. He elaborated to Hollingsworth Wood on the role Fisk could play, stating "...the state and city authorities are very much worried over the lack of sufficient training schools for teachers and are planning, at least in the city, to provide additional means. State Rural Supervisor Smith, having to do with Negro schools, is convinced of the great desirability of a summer school here." McKenzie envisioned Fisk as a center for teacher training, and suggested to Wood that "We should not only set standards for advanced training for teachers in this state, but we would meet the needs of those capable of meeting our standards throughout a large number of the Southern States."¹¹⁴ As Fisk could not fund such an initiative out of its general operating budget, it looked to industrial philanthropy for financial assistance. In early 1917, The General Education Board expressed interest in funding the program, agreeing with McKenzie that it would help enhance the quality of primary and secondary education throughout the South. With the outbreak of World War I and increasing economic uncertainty throughout the country, the GEB reconsidered and "deemed it wise to postpone the consideration of a summer school on account of the war."¹¹⁵ It was not until 1920-21 – five years after McKenzie first proposed the idea – that Fisk established a summer school program.

McKenzie considered music one of Fisk's greatest assets – anchored, of course, by the Jubilee Singers – and he sought to generate greater public greater exposure to the School's impressive musical tradition. He informed the trustees of his desire to "develop

¹¹⁴ McKenzie to Wood, 15 November 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 3.

¹¹⁵ McKenzie to Hollingsworth Wood, 18 November 1917, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 3.

at a definite hour each week a musical program, which because of its fixed time and high quality would become a regular time for the residents and visitors of Nashville to visit our campus. This will be our permanent way of reaching the local public.”¹¹⁶

Although his plan for a weekly musical event never materialized, McKenzie aggressively promoted Fisk’s Jubilee Singers, and often accompanied them on tours throughout the United States.

As always, lack of resources frustrated McKenzie’s plans for Fisk, but that did not prevent him from voicing ideas for new programs to the trustees. The combination of the War, Fisk’s role as a center for troop mobilization, and the Influenza pandemic curtailed progress on new campus initiatives during 1917-1918, and in early 1919 McKenzie wrote Hollingsworth Wood regarding his desire for Fisk to more aggressively engage with the Black community:

There are many things we ought to do to develop a cordial relationship with the town and adjacent country, and many ways in which we might be of real service to them. It would take a small fund to enable us to gather together once in a while and to interest the colored clergy, the colored teachers, and the neighbors. We ought to be doing extension work in community singing in Nashville and over the state, and a similar work in extension lectures. A night school on the campus is one of the urgent needs of our situation and of our city.¹¹⁷

McKenzie viewed summer school for Black church leaders, and student engagement in Black churches during Sunday services, as important tools for community engagement:

...if we had the funds we might gather a group of preachers for two weeks, or four weeks, or longer, and do them some good. As we develop our courses along

¹¹⁶ McKenzie to the Board of Trustees of Fisk University, 8 February 1915, GEB Papers, box 138, folder 1272.

¹¹⁷ McKenzie to Wood, 18 April 1919, LWH Papers, box 18, folder 9.

religious and recreational lines we probably shall be able to develop the equivalent of a Y.M.C.A. training course, and we may be able to utilize our more advanced students to real advantage in the churches and Sunday schools of the city.¹¹⁸

Fundraising efforts focused on meeting Fisk's annual operating expenses, and increased attention toward the endowment campaign, which included more aggressive outreach to White Nashvillians, combined to stall progress on several of McKenzie's ideas to more fully engage with the Black community.

Fundraising

In 1910 Booker T. Washington was appointed to Fisk's board of trustees in an attempt to direct greater philanthropic resources to Fisk. The strategy worked, and during his time on Fisk's board, Washington steered significant funds to Fisk during a time when the University's finances were in such poor shape the trustees considered merging with Atlanta University. With Washington's death less than one week after McKenzie's inauguration, the importance of raising money took on an added sense of urgency.

Although McKenzie and Fisk's trustees did not know it at the time, Washington's passing, in an ironic twist, likely opened the door to much greater fundraising potential. Washington enjoyed strong relationships with most industrial philanthropists, and they turned to him for advice and guidance in matters relating to race relations and Black education. Many of the industrialists were proponents of Washington's model of industrial education, and gave generously to Tuskegee. With Washington's passing Black America lost its most important spokesperson, industrial philanthropists missed his counsel and steadying influence on matters related to Black education, and Fisk

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

University lost its most effective fundraiser and influential trustee. Despite Washington's success in generating funds for Fisk, his passing removed a significant barrier for the advance of Black liberal arts higher education. Absent a prominent and persuasive Black leader to sustain Washington's influence and advocacy for industrial education, and induced by changing social conditions, the industrial model began a long and slow decline. As it fell out of favor, Fisk was well positioned to capture shifting interest toward liberal arts education, and the University's \$1 million endowment campaign marked the first meaningful foray of industrial philanthropy in black classical higher education.

Fundraising efforts hampered by World War I gained little momentum after the War ended. Shortly after the Versailles Treaty, the U.S. economy entered a brief but severe recession characterized by extreme deflation and high unemployment. Announcement of Fisk's endowment campaign during the height of the recession could not have come at a worse economic time. The difficult fundraising environment led McKenzie to explore hiring professional fundraisers, a model Tuskegee had used for several years to great success.¹¹⁹ Paul Cravath, chairman of Fisk's board of trustees, was opposed to the idea, telling McKenzie that "...my instinct would be against the kind of drive you have in mind (by professionals)." He cautioned that "the efforts to raise money

119 For further information on Tuskegee's fundraising model and success under the leadership of Booker T. Washington, see Henry S. Enck, "Tuskegee Institute and Northern White Philanthropy: A Case Study in Fund Raising, 1900-1915," *The Journal of Negro History*, 65, 4, 1980, 336-348.

for such an institution through a professional money raiser, so far as they have come within my notice, have been unsuccessful.”¹²⁰

McKenzie worked hard to create a campus environment committed to strong scholarship and strict student conduct, and he believed Fisk’s endowment campaign should highlight Fisk’s accomplishments and approach to Black liberal arts higher education. In a revealing letter to William Baldwin III, a Fisk trustee who spearheaded fundraising efforts in northern cities, McKenzie argued the basis of the campaign should focus on Fisk’s unique approach to Black liberal arts higher education:

I have been trying...for some years to try to get our constituency to understand that our only hope of making an impression and securing large funds for the support of the University was to demonstrate that Fisk University was unique. So long as we are content to throw our argument in a form which will apply in most of its phases to any number of colored institutions, we are substantially refusing to recognize our own achievements, and the only reasons for the existence of the institution.¹²¹

McKenzie asserted money would come to Fisk not because it was simply a Black college, but because of the “detailed policies and achievements of Fisk University at this very moment, and for the detailed achievements and policies which we can guarantee for the near future upon the basis of the intelligence and backbone and wisdom of the existing administration and University.” He believed highlighting Fisk’s commitment to standards and discipline – of articulating the plan in action – would attract financial

120 Cravath to McKenzie, 25 August 1919, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 1.

121 McKenzie to Baldwin, 22 December 1922, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 1.

support, and McKenzie encouraged Baldwin to showcase Fisk's accomplishments and standards.¹²²

While Baldwin agreed with the importance of Fisk's accomplishments and policies, he argued the primary campaign message should transcend Fisk's specific achievements and focus instead on how the University could help address and alleviate issues related to the impact of Black migration on Northern economic, social, and cultural interests. Baldwin explained to McKenzie:

We are concentrating our campaign on the North where the prevailing idea of the forces let loose by the migration is still pretty muddy. If we are going to get anywhere we have got to make Northerners see that this is not merely just another appeal to help out the South, but that it has a very direct bearing on whether they are going to get contented labor in their own factories and on whether their own cities are going to be swept by race riots. As I see it, the uniqueness of Fisk that we should stress is that it has built up such a leadership and so much prestige that a dollar invested in Fisk will have a real influence on dozens of other institutions and on the whole secondary school system serving the great bulk of the Negro masses.¹²³

Baldwin admitted that, "It has already been proved that it is not the easiest thing to raise so considerable a sum for a Negro college," and correctly noted that "it will prove impossible unless we go after and get a substantial part of the half million from the Funds and big givers."¹²⁴

The philosophical difference over campaign strategy between McKenzie and Baldwin is not surprising. Baldwin sought to raise interest and support in Northeast industrial centers, and his appeals targeted primarily business leaders. These individuals

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Baldwin to McKenzie, 2 January 1923, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 2.

¹²⁴ Ibid. The "Funds and big givers" alludes to northern foundations and industrial philanthropists.

were less concerned with circumstances unique to Fisk and Nashville than with how assisting Black education might ease racial tensions in the North and South and advance the country's economic and social interests. Baldwin also appealed to foundation executives who, while more interested in administrative affairs at Fisk than Northern businessmen, were extremely mindful not to aggravate Southern sensibilities regarding Northern intrusion into Southern Black education. Therefore, Baldwin's message transcended Fisk's accomplishments and policies and focused instead on how Fisk could improve race relations by alleviating economic and social issues, including those caused by Black migration to the North. A campaign letter sent to a Northern businessman in late 1923 reflected Baldwin's strategy. He suggested the appeal was made in the context of developing "better race relations," and that Fisk's campaign rivaled in importance that of Harvard's recent \$12 million campaign. Baldwin proclaimed that Fisk had a "great opportunity....in the field of Negro education and of interracial relations," and that Black education was "an essential national service, every close student of the interracial situation in America is convinced..." Baldwin underscored the importance of Black education on Northern interests, as the migration of Blacks northward, "has changed overnight the Negro problem from a purely sectional matter into one which the great industrial centers of the north must face and work satisfactorily at peril of renewed race riots."¹²⁵

While Baldwin tailored his campaign messages to Northern concerns, McKenzie spearheaded fundraising efforts throughout much of the South, and crafted campaign appeals that resonated more deeply with Southern interests. Directing most of his

¹²⁵ Baldwin to Galen L. Stone, 27 November 1923, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 4.

attention toward businessmen and progressive Whites in Nashville, these Southern constituencies welcomed McKenzie's focus on student conduct and discipline, and appreciated that Fisk discouraged student agitation over Southern racial conditions.

The contrasting approaches over campaign strategy created a fractious relationship between McKenzie and Baldwin. With Baldwin leading campaign efforts in the North and crafting campaign messaging appropriate to Northern constituencies, McKenzie felt his influence – and the accomplishments of Fisk – marginalized. Moreover, McKenzie's responsibility to raise \$100,000 to eliminate Fisk's current debt and cover partial expenses for 1923 collided with Baldwin's fundraising efforts for the endowment campaign. Frustrated by Baldwin's criticisms at how he engaged with a donor courted by Baldwin, McKenzie told his colleague, "As you will see, I am following your advice in two respects very literally. I was seeking to establish a personally cordial relationship with donors to our current funds, and I was also taking complete pains to see that I was not encroaching upon the field of the campaign of the endowment fund." McKenzie complained to Baldwin that "it is very depressing for me to feel that I am under suspicion of not co-operating at the same time that I am not informed as to the plans for the million dollar campaign as they develop." Reiterating his belief in the importance of Fisk's accomplishments in framing campaign appeals, he told Baldwin that, "I had assumed that the efficiency of the campaign would compel continuous conferences with me, as well as the continuous presentation of the detailed policies of the institution if not of the personality of the President."¹²⁶

126 McKenzie to Baldwin, 27 September 1923, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 4. McKenzie sent copies of the letter to Paul Cravath, L. Hollingsworth Wood, and Thomas Jesse Jones.

The campaign progressed slowly, as the sputtering U.S. economy in the early 1920s made raising money difficult. At the conclusion of the World War, demobilization of troops coupled with expanding immigration dramatically increased the labor force, and unemployment skyrocketed from 1.4 percent in 1919 to 11.7 percent two years later. The labor strife and strikes that plagued the economy during and immediately after the War – nearly four million workers were on strike at one time or another during 1919 – quickly ended as production output fell. As a result, the U.S. economy experienced a sudden and acute deflationary period that lasted through the middle of 1921.¹²⁷ With unemployment high and the economic outlook uncertain, Fisk's campaign committee struggled to obtain financial commitments.

Much of McKenzie's fundraising work focused on soliciting wealthy individuals, but he also searched for alternative means to generate funds. Offering Fisk's campus as a site for Black soldier mobilization during World War I was done in large part out of financial interests, as the additional revenue helped subsidize University operations. McKenzie also sought to capitalize on the popularity of the Jubilee Singers to help raise funds. In addition to the Singers' annual tours – the proceeds from which flowed to Fisk's operating budget – McKenzie sought to generate income from royalties from sales of the Singers' recordings. Although never a huge hit commercially, record sales did generate modest royalties for the University. McKenzie also considered positioning Fisk as a center for Black music, and suggested to Wood that, "I wonder if you could not find

127 J.R. Vernon, "The 1920-21 Deflation: The Role of Aggregate Supply," *Economic Inquiry*, 29, 1991, 572-80.

out more about the Julliard Foundation and see wherein Fisk University could be aided by this fund to become the home of Negro music?”¹²⁸

With student conduct an important component of his vision for Fisk, and a key theme for Southern fundraising efforts, McKenzie worked hard to ensure the reality corresponded to his rhetoric. As the endowment campaign struggled to secure Southern donors, his attention to strict student oversight became more pronounced. McKenzie’s desire to ensure a campus environment free of student trouble and dissent, where Fiskites dutifully went about their study and activities, devolved into a near fanaticism. Any activity or circumstance that could tarnish Fisk’s carefully crafted campaign rhetoric was quickly suppressed.

The Socio-Cultural Context During McKenzie’s Administration

Less than one week after his inauguration, Fayette McKenzie boarded an all-Black train headed to Tuskegee, Alabama to attend the funeral of Booker T. Washington. The loss of the nation’s foremost Black leader, and Fisk’s most important and effective fundraiser, created an auspicious beginning to McKenzie’s presidency. Just eighteen months later the United States declared war on Germany, which ushered in a period of social, racial, and political turbulence that profoundly influenced his administration.

The military presence on Fisk’s campus during fall 1918 contributed to an increase in student misconduct, but discipline issues had been a persistent challenge at Fisk for some years. During 1917-1918 student behavior was particularly troublesome, which McKenzie attributed to increasing student interest in anarchist and left-wing political ideology circulating in the United States. No evidence supports McKenzie’s

¹²⁸ McKenzie to Wood, 14 July 1919, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 10.

conclusion that an anarchist movement infiltrated Fisk, but his fear reflected the growing distrust and suspicion among Americans for ideological positions and opinions not of the mainstream. Unease over the waves of immigrants coming to the United States, growing labor unrest in America's industrial centers, U.S. entrance into World War I, and strong anti-communist sentiment fueled by the Russian Revolution heightened Americans' anxiety and discouraged dissent. Mainstream news organizations depicted Bolshevik rule "as a compound of slaughter, confiscation, and disorder," and portrayed communist sympathizers as unpatriotic and dangerous.¹²⁹ Fear of communist infiltration in the U.S. led to a "Red Scare" that swept over the country in 1918-19, and contributed to violence, disruptions in commerce, and a populous highly suspicious of agitators and foreign influences. Growing Black self-determination, in part a result of Blacks' experience in World War I, and White fears of growing Black economic power led to a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1920s.

As anti-establishment rhetoric fell into national disfavor, legal forms of protest, including labor strikes facilitated by the Industrial Workers of the World, were often portrayed as radical threats to American society. Historian Levin Murray argued the public sentiment quickly grew into "a nationwide anti-radical hysteria provoked by a mounting fear and anxiety that a Bolshevik revolution in America was imminent – a revolution that would change Church, home, marriage, civility, and the American way of

129 Geoffery R. Stone. *Perilous Times: Free Speech In Wartime From the Sedition Act of 1798 to the War on Terrorism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 221.

life.”¹³⁰ President Woodrow Wilson’s signing of the Sedition Act in May 1918, which prohibited language detrimental to the United States and the War effort, further exacerbated anti-leftist sentiment.¹³¹ Indeed, David Kennedy observed with Wilson’s administration an “overbearing concern for ‘correct’ opinions, for expression, for language itself, and the creation of an enormous propaganda apparatus to nurture the desired state of mind and excoriate all dissenters.”¹³² McKenzie viewed egregious student behavioral transgressions as evidence of anti-establishment, leftist revolutionary sympathies circulating within the Fisk student body. Commenting on campus behavior problems in 1917-1918, he invoked language of the period when noting, “The bolsheviki spirit has interfered very seriously with the discipline at the University this year...I hope we can effect a revolution next year in our discipline.”¹³³

The situation grew more complicated in late 1918 with public panic over the influenza pandemic. Nashville’s population at the time numbered roughly 155,000, and over 40,000 residents contracted the illness, with 400 deaths reported. Hospitals were overrun with cases, and the city suffered from an acute shortage of medical doctors. One third of the city’s physicians were on active duty in the military service, and by one account, “almost every doctor” who remained in Nashville “contracted the disease, and a number of them died.” In early October, Nashville banned all non-essential gatherings,

130 Murray B. Levin. *Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression* (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 29.

131 The Sedition Act of 1918 was an amendment to the Espionage Act of 1917, and forbade Americans “to willfully utter, print, write, or publish and disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language” about the United States government, its military or its flag during times of war. Stone, *Perilous Times*, 186.

132 David M. Kennedy, *Over Here* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980). 62.

133 McKenzie to Wood, 30 May 1918, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 5.

effectively closing theaters, dance halls, and other entertainment venues, and a few days later closed city schools, with officials asking ministers to halt church services. The epidemic slowly ran its course, and schools and places of amusement reopened on 1 November, helping Nashville return to normal.¹³⁴ Apart from the impact on daily campus activities, fear over the sickness stalled Fisk's fundraising efforts nationwide, and the Jubilee Singers cancelled a planned tour. A depressed McKenzie bluntly informed Hollingsworth Wood, "The influenza has torn up our plans by the roots. Practically all engagements [of the Jubilee Singers] are postponed."¹³⁵ Absent expected revenue from fundraising initiatives, McKenzie pleaded to Wood in late 1918 to secure financial support from the General Education Board and Carnegie Corporation.

The outbreak of war in Europe reduced European immigration to the United States to a trickle, and the low wage labor supply that filled Northern factories contracted sharply. With U.S. entry into the War, the military draft depleted the labor pool even further. Lured by manufacturing jobs and the promise of a better life in the North, Blacks began a massive migration to Northern industrial centers, and by 1920 over 300,000 had relocated to Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, and Cleveland. The sudden exodus of their labor pool – and therefore their economic security – sent alarm throughout White communities in the South, but Whites in the North reacted with similar consternation over the influx of Blacks into their cities.¹³⁶ Southern White anger over increasing race assertiveness of

134 John B. Thomson, M.D., "The 1918 Influenza Epidemic in Nashville," *Journal of the Tennessee Medical Association* 71, no.4 (April, 1978): 261-270.

135 McKenzie to Wood, 18 October 1918, LHW Papers, box 18, folder 6.

136 Kennedy, *Over Here*, 62.

Blacks, and Northern White concerns about Black migration, led to more virulent racism and frequent outbreaks of racial violence. The tense atmosphere exploded during the summer of 1919. On 10 May 1919 race riots erupted in Charleston, South Carolina and Sylvester, Georgia, and over the next five months over 30 race riots occurred across the United States, with nearly one third afflicting Southern cities. One of the most violent took place in Knoxville, Tennessee, just 184 miles from Fisk. The one-day riot claimed the lives of seven people (six Black), injured hundreds, caused widespread property damage, and led to a permanent exodus of nearly 1,500 Black Knoxville residents.¹³⁷ A report on the riots authored by Dr. George E. Haynes, Director of Negro Economics at the U.S. Department of Labor, suggested over 50 Blacks were lynched, including eight burned at the stake. The alarming level of violence between May and October 1919 led James Weldon Johnson, a field secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to term the period “Red Summer.”¹³⁸

Although Nashville possessed a reputation for a less virulent strain of racism than communities in the deep South, the city strictly adhered to Jim Crow social codes and Southern racial beliefs. Still, perhaps because of Nashville’s slightly more progressive leanings, McKenzie worried less about the potential danger of racial violence in the city than the opportunity the 1919 riots presented to make the case for Black education. McKenzie hoped coverage of the riots would help sensitize Whites to the inequity of

137 Lee E. Williams and Lee E. Williams II. *Anatomy of Four Race Riots: Racial Conflict in Knoxville, Elaine (Arkansas), Tulsa, and Chicago, 1919-1921*. (Jackson, Mississippi: University and College Press, 1972)., Kennedy, *Over Here*, 34-35.

138 George E. Haynes, *For Action on Race Riot Peril*, New York Times, 5 October 1919. Haynes had left Fisk shortly prior for a position with the federal government.

Black social conditions and lack of opportunity, especially as it related to education.

Always the fundraiser, McKenzie sensed in the upheaval a unique opportunity to win for Fisk sympathetic support and resources. The race riots, “have increased the interest of the public in Negro education,” McKenzie declared in a letter to Paul Cravath. “This leads me to say that my belief in the opportuneness as well as the necessity of an effort for a large development at Fisk has become an intense conviction, almost an internal compulsion these last few weeks.” He believed it the “psychological moment” to begin a large financial campaign for Fisk.¹³⁹

The New Negro Movement

According to historian Lester Lamon, there emerged in the 1920s a generation of Black Americans who rejected White paternalism, and Black colleges often served as “the incubators of discontent.”¹⁴⁰ A convergence of circumstances, slowly building since the mid-teens, burst forth and unleashed a “race-conscious, assertive, race-proud New Negro.”¹⁴¹ The growing prominence of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, and the Niagara Movement helped foment Black discontent with prevailing social conditions. Black soldiers, after fighting for democracy in World War I, returned home and resented the lack of democratic processes afforded them. Increased Black geographic mobility –

139 McKenzie to Cravath, 15 August 1919, LHW Papers. box 18, folder 10.

140 Lamon, “The Black Community in Nashville,” 225.

141 August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1963), 256.

especially to the North – and better economic opportunities furthered feelings of Black empowerment.

Social changes in broader U.S. society also contributed to growing Black self-determination. Throughout the 1920s, the United States experienced what one historian characterized as a, “revolution in morals and manners,” especially among youth.¹⁴² The religious piety that had long served as a basis for personal and social customs gave way to motivations for pleasure, wealth, and the nouveau. Emerging technologies such as the automobile, motion pictures, and musical recordings combined with bold new expressions in women’s fashion and behavior that seeded growing antagonism toward outdated and overly conservative aspects of life. A president of a Florida college, alarmed at women’s provocative dress, declared that, “The low-cut gowns, the rolled hose and short skirts are born of the Devil and his agents, and are carrying the present and future generations to chaos and destruction.”¹⁴³ Improvements in dissemination of news and culture provided many Blacks views of the world outside the South. The rise of Harlem as the capital of Black America and the flowering of Negro arts, including music and literature, attracted considerable attention among Blacks and Whites.¹⁴⁴ Black advancement on so many different fronts encouraged Black youth to throw off the shackles of compromise and accommodation and boldly assert the rights and privileges promised them as citizens of the United States.

¹⁴² Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 90.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, 256. Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 84.

As Blacks began asserting race pride, White-led initiatives gained momentum to suppress its manifestation. Influenced by the proponents of scientific racism and eugenics, many Americans considered Blacks intellectually inferior and resented their growing self-determination and empowerment. Increasingly restrictive Jim Crow laws signaled outright hostility to the concept of civic equality for non-Whites. New technologies, including motion pictures, offered powerful vehicles to communicate racist messages. D.W. Griffith's influential and highly popular film, *Birth of a Nation*, portrayed Blacks as savage beasts, promoted existing White stereotypes of Black licentiousness and savagery, and sympathetically treated White supremacy.¹⁴⁵

Not surprisingly, the new Black consciousness alarmed the White South. As Michael Dennis asserted, "white southerners, having decided that social equality was unthinkable, were determined to enforce social separation and racial subordination."¹⁴⁶ Congressman James Byrnes from South Carolina declared that Black newspapers and magazines had caused increased antagonism between the races, further fueled by efforts for Black suffrage and northern capitalists looking for cheap Black labor. Byrnes stated that Blacks inoculated with desires for political or social equality should stay away from the South, as there was no room for them.¹⁴⁷ Some of the White antagonism focused on Black education, an oxymoron for many southern whites. White southerners felt education undermined Blacks' willingness to toil in agricultural and other industrial

145 Herbert Aptheker, "The Negro College Student in the 1920s – Years of Preparation and Protest: An Introduction," *Science and Society*, 32 (1969), 152.

146 Michael Dennis, "Schooling Along the Color Line: Progressives and the Education of Blacks in the New South" *The Journal of Negro Education* 67, no. 2 (Spring, 1998): 149.

147 Quoted in Williams and Williams II, *Anatomy of Four Race Riots*, 21.

pursuits, and directly led to greater Black assertiveness and race pride. James K.

Vardaman, a Senator from Mississippi known for his strong racist beliefs, voiced what many Southerners felt: “What the North is sending South is not money but dynamite; this education is ruining our Negros. They’re demanding equality.”¹⁴⁸

Fisk University’s student body represented a cross-section of Black America. Children of sharecropping parents who grew up in shacks with dirt floors interacted with young men and women from privileged Black families. Blacks from racially progressive cities in the North lived with counterparts from staunchly racist communities in the South, where racial violence was a constant threat. Despite their varied backgrounds, the students who attended Fisk represented the DuBoisian concept of the “Talented Tenth,” and many saw themselves as future leaders within Black America. With a youthful mentality more aligned with uplift than accommodation, many Fisk students eagerly engaged in protest against campus policies they saw as demeaning and paternalistic.

The Final Year: June 1924 – April 1925

When Fayette McKenzie arrived at Fisk, he entered into a social environment unlike he had ever known. He possessed extensive knowledge and experience on Indian affairs, but White America’s opinions of Blacks and Native Americans differed considerably. A 1914 letter Booker T. Washington wrote Paul Cravath regarding his thoughts on John C. Shedd, a candidate for Fisk’s presidency, highlighted the tense environment in which McKenzie worked. It will take “two or three years to bring this element [Nashville Whites] into sympathy with him and this would require patient, hard work,” Washington stated. Further, Shedd “ought to be cautioned not to be too ready

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Wolters, *The New Negro*, 5.

with opinions concerning Fisk or Southern conditions.”¹⁴⁹ Many Americans were largely ambivalent about assimilation of Native Americans into White society, but the South vehemently opposed Black rights and responsibilities – especially political and legal – that suggested Black equality. While most White Americans viewed Indians with a combination of pity, curiosity, and ambivalence, their perception of Blacks spawned a new term: Negrophobia.

McKenzie’s strict approach toward student conduct and discipline collided with the New Negro spirit of Black determination and uplift rapidly spreading among Black college students. His approach toward race relations – perhaps best illustrated by his Triangle of Peace, which sought conciliation through active engagement of northern Whites, southern Whites, and Blacks – compromised Black assertiveness in the minds of progressive Black students and alumni. Neither McKenzie’s approach to race relations nor his strategy to build a greater Fisk appealed to progressive Blacks. Not content to settle for conciliatory relations with Whites – which often meant Black compromise, not White – students and alumni sought to change a host of Fisk policies concerning student conduct, discipline, and extracurricular activities.

McKenzie largely ignored rhetoric from both conservative Southern Whites opposed to Black education and progressive Blacks who advocated liberalizing Fisk’s institutional policies. From a practical standpoint, loosening standards related to student conduct and discipline risked sacrificing important White support in Nashville and the South, not to mention philanthropic funding. Moreover, granting greater freedoms

149 Letter from Booker T. Washington to Paul D. Cravath, May 25, 1914; Harlan and Smock, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 32.

betrayed McKenzie's personal convictions and the ideals upon which Fisk was founded. Insufficiently militant to satisfy progressive Blacks – including many Fisk alumni and students – and far too progressive for conservative Southern Whites, McKenzie focused his attention on those groups with whom he could effectively engage: liberal leaning Whites in the north and south, and Blacks who sought racial cooperation through cooperation, conciliation, and working “within the system.” McKenzie's highly pragmatic approach acknowledged the fact that elevating Fisk to the ranks of premier liberal arts colleges in the country required White toleration and support, as financial assistance from Blacks could not come close to supporting Fisk's resource needs. McKenzie viewed his administration as preparing the foundation on which Fisk could aggressively build for long-term success. In doing so, he necessarily exposed himself and his administration to severe criticism, especially from Blacks.

Broader changes in popular culture combined with forces of the New Negro movement to increase animosity toward paternalistic policies at many Black liberal arts colleges. Although resentment against McKenzie's administration and its policies had festered among Fisk alumni and students for several years, organized student revolt appeared unlikely if not for the support and encouragement of Fisk's most famous alumnus, W.E.B. DuBois. In addition to supplying the spark that started the public protest of McKenzie's administration, DuBois provided additional fuel and stoked the fire of dissent for nearly a year through his editorials in *The Crisis*.

DuBois and McKenzie were familiar to one another, and at the beginning of his administration McKenzie held DuBois in high regard. In his first post-inauguration

address to Fisk's student body, McKenzie spoke about of the influence of three men in his life, and two of them were Booker T. Washington and DuBois. Calling DuBois the "American who made the greatest impression at the great Races Conference in London in 1911," McKenzie related how his attendance at a DuBois speech in Washington, D.C., influenced his thinking on education.¹⁵⁰ For his part, DuBois likely supported and appreciated McKenzie's work with the Society of American Indians, as for several years he was the Society's only black member. In a *Crisis* article in late 1924, he wrote of McKenzie's appointment as President: "I knew him. I called him friend. I saw in him a new type of young, scientific philanthropist come to help and re-establish training among Negroes."¹⁵¹

DuBois, whose daughter Yolanda attended Fisk during the early 1920s, observed with dismay McKenzie's policies governing student behavior, restricting Greek societies, marginalizing intercollegiate athletics, and restructuring the student newspaper.

Reluctant to agitate for change because Fisk "was in the throes of gathering a desperately needed endowment and it seemed unfair and unwise to raise a disturbing voice at so critical a time," DuBois stayed silent.¹⁵² When Fisk announced the endowment fund fully subscribed, he felt comfortable coming forward to express his anger and frustration.

150 Dr. Fayette Avery McKenzie. "Opening Address Before the Student Body, January 22," *Fisk University News*, 6, No. 2 (March, 1915) 4-6. McKenzie paraphrased the points in DuBois's speech he found salient: "...we ought not to limit our interest and range of thought even to the problems of a whole race. In order to comprehend the problems of one race we must understand the problems of other races. Nothing can be measured in terms of itself. No race can measure itself by itself." McKenzie stated DuBois' remarks gave him a "great idea" – that "the appreciation of those unlike us is essential to largeness of self." McKenzie then extended the idea to an educational setting, suggesting that "somehow our minds are built out of the materials found in our experiences and our education. We must see to it that we have sufficient materials."

151 W.E.B. DuBois, "Opinion," *The Crisis* 28, no 4 (October 1924): 251.

152 W.E.B. DuBois, "Opinion," *The Crisis* 28, no 3 (September 1924): 199-203.

In June 1924, DuBois visited Fisk on the occasion of his daughter's graduation, and he provided a formal address to Fisk alumni in connection with the University's commencement exercises. In front of a packed Fisk Memorial Chapel, and with McKenzie and his wife sitting in the front row, DuBois declared, "I have come to address you and, I say frankly, I have come to criticize." Asserting that "...I have never known an institution whose alumni on the whole are more bitter and disgusted with the present situation in this university than the alumni of Fisk University today," DuBois endeavored to inform the administration "openly and before your face what so many of your graduates are saying secretly behind your back..."¹⁵³

Arguing that in its pursuit of fiscal security Fisk sold out to Southern White interests and industrial philanthropy, DuBois remarked that, "Of all the essentials that make an institution of learning, money is the least." He suggested that an institution's spiritual equipment – the freedom of spirit, self-knowledge, and truth – were far more important than a campus's physical attributes. In courting philanthropic money, Fisk's leadership eliminated the campus's spiritual energy. Nowhere was this more evident than in the University's strict disciplinary policies. "I do not for a moment doubt that the object which Fisk today wishes to gain by her discipline are in themselves perfectly good objects," DuBois stated, "but the trouble is that she is trying to accomplish her ends by methods which are medieval, and long since discredited." He suggested students learned discipline through freedom, and lamented, "self-expression and manhood are choked at Fisk in the very day when we need expression to develop manhood in the colored race."

153 DuBois, W.E.B. (1973). "Diuturni Silentii," in *The Education of Black People: Ten Critiques, 1906-1960*, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 41-60.

DuBois called on alumni to reclaim Fisk's spirit, and proclaimed, "the alumni of Fisk University are and of right ought to be, the ultimate source of authority in the policy and government..." of the University. He argued that alumni had no voice in the policies of Fisk, and complained alumni serving as board members were selected by McKenzie and other trustees and "may not represent the opinion of the alumni." DuBois ended his address by encouraging alumni to make public, "what is happening at Fisk University," to organize in order to save Fisk, and to demand elective representation on the board of trustees. Finally, he argued that until conditions at Fisk changed for the better, students should boycott the University.¹⁵⁴

Given his desire to energize and mobilize students and alumni against Fisk's administration, DuBois's speech favored political rhetoric more than an accurate assessment of events and conditions at Fisk. His recounting of Fisk administrators allowing segregated ticket windows and seating at a Jubilee Singers concert, and of McKenzie leading female members of the Fisk Glee Club through the servants' entrance to sing for Southern White men, omitted important details that refuted the conclusions his anecdotes implied.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, DuBois implied that Fisk had pursued an imprudent strategy toward Black education and uplift:

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ In a letter written shortly after DuBois's address, McKenzie admitted to Paul D. Cravath that at the first of the two concerts "the manager of the Auditorium helped in the sale of tickets and not very tactfully turned the colored people to one window, her object being to get two streams of people...in accordance with their destination. This matter was brought to my attention that night by one of our alumni and the situation was changed the next morning." He further noted that "we recently widened the amount of space allowed the colored people, so much so that at the last concert, in May, hundreds of white people overflowed into the colored section, mingling indiscriminately with the colored people." McKenzie to Cravath, 8 June 1924. LHW Wood Papers, box 22, folder 171.

One can imagine, of course, two extreme attitudes a Negro college might take with regard to the surrounding South: it might teach that the case is hopeless; that no Negro can expect to be a man in this country with the present attitude and determination of the whites. Or it might go to the opposite extreme and say that all is well and that the best thought of the country is tending toward justice and that Negro's only hindrance is himself.¹⁵⁶

DuBois recognized "that neither of these positions is tenable," and suggested that a "real university with honest purpose...ought frankly to face the fact that there are here forces of advancement and uplift, that there are forces of evil and retrogression, and that it is for the educated man to find a way amid these difficulties." DuBois's simplistic characterization marginalized the significant complexity of Fisk's situation. He knew as much, and he also recognized only through compromise did Fisk successfully raise a \$1 million endowment. In his address, however, he exaggerated both the scope of compromise and its sinister implications:

I have said that these things are taking place at Fisk University mainly through ignorance, mainly because the present workers of this institution do not realize what they are doing or why they should not do these things. But there is, I confess, one other reason...so sinister and so unfortunate that I hesitate to mention it; it is this: For a long time a powerful section of the white South has offered to give its consent and countenance to the higher training of Negroes only on condition that the white South control and guide that education. And it is possible that for a million dollars the authorities of Fisk University have been asked either openly or by implication to sell to the white South the control of this institution.¹⁵⁷

Although well received by most students and alumni in attendance, DuBois' address did anger some alumni and leading Nashville Blacks who disagreed with his assertions. One alumnus, the mother of a graduating senior, took the podium almost

156 DuBois, W.E.B. (1973). "Diuturni Silentii," in *The Education of Black People*, 41-60.

157 Ibid., 60.

immediately after DuBois, and, “without mentioning him [DuBois] or his talk, expressed herself in exactly the opposite point of view.”¹⁵⁸

Upon hearing news of the speech, Paul Cravath, chairman of the board of trustees, asked McKenzie for a report. On 8 June, McKenzie forwarded Cravath a six page letter addressing the matter. McKenzie’s version of events is surprisingly impartial, and he provided explanations for DuBois’ accusations that were “not more than partially true.” He admitted that after the speech “the audience was tumultuous in its applause and so carried away that it seemed to almost trample over Mrs. McKenzie and me after the address...” McKenzie also acknowledged that “the dominant view of the colored people today is more or less sympathetic with Dr. DuBois on the race issue,” and conceded that “nothing is so popular with colored audiences as denunciation of the whites, and nothing so unpopular as its absence.”¹⁵⁹

McKenzie clearly recognized the ramifications of DuBois’s address. “The whole situation is one that is very serious indeed,” he told Cravath. “It has only one or two solutions, and those solutions rest in the hands of the Trustees.” For McKenzie, any resolution that included his continuation as President required unqualified support from Fisk’s board:

She [Nettie McKenzie] is emphatically of the opinion with me that there is no justification for our long continuance here unless we can have absolute and unreserved and emphatic support by the Board of Trustees and by every single member of the Board. We have given everything we possessed for this work for nine years. We have less property now than when we came here. We are both more than nine years older as a result of the situation. We are grateful for your hopes for a restful summer for us but we see no prospect of it. There can be no

¹⁵⁸ McKenzie to Cravath, 8 June 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

rest until there has been a demonstration that the University stands unshaken and unmoved and true to all of the things which have brought attack from such a source.¹⁶⁰

Nettie McKenzie provided a more definitive ultimatum in a letter to Hollingsworth Wood. She regretted that her family's summer plans to "motor to a lake" had been abandoned "because the future is so very uncertain," and "we might not spend what income we have when no one knows where one way leadeth." Curiously reflective – as if anticipating an unfortunate outcome for her husband – she noted that "we have learned a great deal about folks, mentally and spiritually, and enjoyed putting ourselves and all we have into the situation, critical as it is. I hope it has been worth while." Finally, Mrs. McKenzie asserted only two outcomes existed to address the situation. Either her husband would be maintained as President with the full support of the trustees, or he "should be given leave of absence for a year...the President to resign at the end of the period of leave."¹⁶¹

McKenzie had long advocated that Fisk's fundraising appeals showcase Fisk, its policies, and its President. After the DuBois speech, he sought to shift the emphasis from his administration *implementing* policies, to the University trustees *approving and endorsing* Fisk's policies. Seeking to redirect attacks away from his administration, McKenzie asserted student conduct and discipline rested more on the shoulders of the trustees – in their official capacity as the policy setting body of the University – than it did with his enforcement of University policy. Within this context, McKenzie suggested to Cravath that the trustees publicly refocus the debate as a trustee issue, not one

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Nettie J. McKenzie to Wood, undated, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.1.

associated with administrators and faculty. “I think that the Trustees ought to remove the burden of attack from the president and the faculty and center it upon themselves,” McKenzie asserted, “thus making it a matter of policy and removing the possibilities of any personal malevolence or consideration.”¹⁶²

To help mobilize faculty and staff support for Fisk’s administration – and stifle those who disagreed with the University’s policies – McKenzie suggested the trustees vet faculty and staff appointments to help assure a supportive attitude toward Fisk’s operating principles. He recognized such an approach would likely lead to accusations of authoritarianism, but concluded the benefits outweighed the risks:

I think the Trustees might communicate with each of the persons whom I am recommending for appointment or reappointments next year, telling them that they approve the recommendations upon the general consideration that the appointees are in full and complete accord with the policies of the institution... This would of course cause some immediate reactions, because there are those on the staff fully in accord with Dr. DuBois’ point of view...some of them since long before my arrival. There would be an immediate cry that despotism of a fearful sort was being exercised and the destruction of private judgment and free thought were decreed. It may be, however, that that is the necessary alternative to continued crucifixion of those who have aimed to maintain the historic policies of Fisk and who believe in interracial peace.¹⁶³

Bolton Smith, a prominent White Southern businessman widely known for his progressive views on Black education and uplift, suggested removing any Fisk employee from their position – whether up for reappointment or not – if they could not support the policies of the administration. Considered at various times for a seat on Fisk’s board, Smith was familiar with the University, McKenzie, and the trustees. After spending several days in Nashville in July 1924 listening to accounts of DuBois’s address, he

¹⁶² McKenzie to Cravath, 8 June 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.1.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

suggested to Paul Cravath that the attack “cannot go unrebuked” and the first response should be “that every supporter of Dr. DuBois on the faculty – high or low or connected with the offices in the colleges – ought to be kicked out. Such an extreme of disloyalty and ill-breeding should not be countenanced.” To support his recommendation, Smith added, “this is also the opinion of Dr. Bruce Payne,” the President of George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, and an educator well known and respected by both the trustees and industrial philanthropists.¹⁶⁴ To help mobilize public opinion in support of Fisk, Smith advised that, “the matter should be brought to the attentions of the *Outlook* or some other of the great weeklies and that an excoriation should be administered.”¹⁶⁵

Mrs. Booker T. Washington, a graduate of Fisk who closely followed the school’s developments, strongly criticized DuBois’s remarks, calling him a “radical” and asserting he “is not always careful of what he says, and when he says it.” Impressed with McKenzie’s accomplishments at Fisk and eager for him to continue strengthening the University, Mrs. Washington also approved of removing faculty not in sympathy with the administration’s policies. “...I have felt that there are some people on the faculty there not loyal,” she wrote Hollingsworth Wood. “This should be definitely found out, and can

164 Payne attended the General Education Board’s 1915 Conference on Negro Education.

165 Smith to Cravath, 22 July 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.1. In his response to Smith’s letter, Cravath questions “if it is advisable to engage in a controversy with Dr. DuBois in the public press or otherwise.” Rather, he advised the best course “is to back up Dr. McKenzie in his policies, and that he should quietly go ahead and carry them out through a faculty made up of persons in full sympathy with him.” Cravath to Smith, 2 September 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.1.

be, and anybody on the faculty who is disloyal should be quietly but frankly gotten rid of, for Fisk is going on improving and growing.”¹⁶⁶

Most White observers condemned DuBois’s remarks as highly inappropriate and offensive, both in content and in the celebratory setting they were offered. Progressive Whites believed DuBois’s call for a more militant approach in effecting change at Fisk threatened to compromise race relations in Nashville and blunt long-term efforts to address the race problem. Several Blacks, including Fisk alumni and parents of current students, also disagreed with DuBois. A 1924 Fisk alumnus declared that he was “heartily opposed to Dr. DuBois” and considered “his attack upon Dr. McKenzie as a cunning and hellish attempt at self-aggrandizement spurred on by his inherent bent for the precipitation (sic) of a crisis.”¹⁶⁷ C.W. Driskell, a 1893 alumnus, exhorted McKenzie to not “give up the ship.” “I want to express from the outset...that the unrighteous harangue is far from expressing the views of all of the graduates of Fisk University,” he wrote. “With keen interest as well as much gratification I have watched your policy of developing the institution for these eight or nine years that you have been at its head, and so far as I am able to judge I find it to be sane, sound, progressive, and uncompromising.” Dr. S.W. Jefferson, Class of 1896, informed McKenzie, “We stand for the exclusion of fraternities, the regulation of athletics, and the enforcement of the rule regarding the mixing of boys and girls on the campus, as in the days of old, under the lamented Dr.

166 Washington to Wood, 26 September 26, 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.2.

167 Letter from N.H. Tarver to L. Hollingsworth Wood, 25 February 1925, LHW Papers, box 23, folder 19.1.

Cravath.” Dr. Jefferson closed his letter, “Yours for the maintenance of law and order.”¹⁶⁸

Beyond simply jeopardizing his Presidency, McKenzie viewed the situation as a serious threat to Fisk’s existence. “It is probably a matter of little concern whether I resign or not so far as I am affected,” he told Cravath. “On the other hand, it is a matter of great concern to the University if its policies can be subject to the whims of unthinking prejudice and personal ambitions. ...It is now too late to prevent as about as damnable an event as could come into one’s life; but it is not too late to save the institution if there be a desire to save it.”¹⁶⁹

McKenzie believed that preserving Fisk’s integrity required strict enforcement of campus law and order, and he considered DuBois’s attack morally and legally wrong. In late 1924, he drafted a memo denouncing DuBois’s method for articulating his grievances, and for his failing to employ “any of the usual, the lawful and the ethical methods for the redress of grievances, open to him and all for whom he was alleged to speak.” Approaching the issue from a legal perspective, McKenzie cited case law to suggest that in some states DuBois’s public contempt for Fisk’s administration would be considered illegal. He referenced a decision from the Georgia Supreme Court asserting that when an individual attacks institutional rules and regulations in the presence of

168 Driskell to McKenzie, 12 June 1924; Jefferson to McKenzie, 8 February 1925, McKenzie Fisk Papers Addendum, box 1, folder 1. For additional correspondence from Fisk alumni and parents of current students critical of DuBois and his methods, see pamphlet titled: *Letters and Telegrams from Parents of Fisk Students, Alumni, Students and Friends-at-Large Together with Certain Statements Relative to the Recent Disturbances at Fisk University February 4, 1925*. The pamphlet, published by McKenzie shortly after the student riot, contains over 75 reprinted letters from primarily parents and alumni supporting his administration. The pamphlet indicated that all the letters were from Blacks. Fisk McKenzie Papers Addendum, box 1, folder 1.

169 McKenzie to Cravath, 8 June 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 171.

school officials and students, prosecution under criminal law is just and proper. He also pointed to an Arkansas law where insulting a teacher in the presence of students is punishable by a fine of \$25. McKenzie raised such examples “to show how seriously courts regard the assault on school government,” and why DuBois’s remarks “ought not to be dismissed with a waive of the hand as if no importance, save in a little wounded feelings.”

In DuBois’s assault, McKenzie saw a troubling precedent: “If a president can be forced to withdraw at Fisk by a method of attack which breathes out contempt for law and decent procedure, will not the methods be employed to unseat other presidents at other institutions? And will not Boards of Trustees be powerless to protect any president?” McKenzie again cited the Georgia Supreme Court decision, noting that it is the “duty of the authorities” of an institution to preclude accusations against school policies or employees, and he asked whether the “Board will sanction mob attacks upon its servants, which violate every known canon of fair play...or whether it will rebuke such mob action by refusing to give hearing to those who teach open disrespect for authority.” He closed the memo by declaring that, “whatever my fate is, I am convinced that my duty now is to the presidents who will succeed me and to the cause of respect for lawful authority in the schools and of protections for those who try to administer the institutions entrusted to their care according to their best judgment.”¹⁷⁰

DuBois continued his crusade against Fisk and McKenzie in the *Crisis* and in Black newspapers across the country, and in the fall of 1924 he embarked upon a lecture

170 Fayette A. McKenzie, undated memo titled, *Employing Lynch Law, Creating Contempt for Authority at Fisk University, Striking Down All Authority in order To Cure Alleged Administrative Evils at Fisk When Lawful Methods of Regress had not been Employed*, LHW Papers, box 23 folder 28.

tour during which he spoke to Fisk alumni clubs throughout the nation. He contacted Fisk students, faculty, and alumni as part of an effort to collect evidence and examples of a paternalistic and authoritarian Fisk administration in sympathy with White Southern interests. As DuBois assembled data, his mission to effect change at Fisk began to more clearly focus on McKenzie's removal. In early 1925, DuBois resurrected the *Fisk Herald*, the former Fisk student newspaper, to publish incriminating and embarrassing evidence against McKenzie and his administration. DuBois published the paper out of his office in New York City, and proclaimed in the inaugural issue, "Unless McKenzie is removed from Fisk, I intend to publish every word of evidence I hold to prove he is unfit and a detriment to the cause of higher education for our race."¹⁷¹

Fisk's campus environment remained tense during fall 1924, and on 22 October a group of Fisk students provided the board of trustees a list of grievances against McKenzie, culminating with the call "for the severing of Fayette McKenzie from the presidency of Fisk and for a system of alumni representation on the board of trustees." The list of student grievances included "unjust and unreasonable" discipline, suppression of student initiative and opinion, unsatisfactory faculty, and "deception in the actions of the president" and his "making every effort to increase the power and influences of the white South at Fisk and...catering to southern white prejudices." The students also charged that neither the trustees, President, nor the faculty "seem to show any regard for

171 *Fisk Herald*, no. 1 (1925).

the feelings or opinions of the alumni, the parents of the students, or of the colored world.”¹⁷²

On 11 November, Fisk students caused minor disturbances on campus, disrupting chapel by dropping their books on the floor, and shouting “DuBois!” throughout the campus. That evening the disturbance grew in intensity as students littered dormitory hallways with trash, destroyed property, and created sufficient noise that it was heard several blocks from campus. After two hours of student protest, Professor Talley, a Black faculty member, appealed for calm, and the students soon went to bed. The following day rumors swirled about students’ “intention of systematic destruction.” When informed of the rumors, Dr. Jefferson, another Black faculty member, visited the boys dormitory, and “by his mere presence brought instant and continuous order and quiet.” At a meeting of faculty and administrators to discuss the situation, some felt that stronger authority was needed to deal with the issue. Dr. Roman, a Black faculty member, suggested that Black faculty and staff meet with the students and communicate the harmful nature of their actions the preceding evening. Despite some reservations

172 *Statement of Grievances against Fayette A. McKenzie as President of Fisk University*, undated document, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.2. In an undated memo written ostensibly for the Trustees, McKenzie responded to the students’ grievances point for point, sometimes referring to himself in the third person. He stated the fact that students are allowed little initiative for opinions is a matter of judgment, but noted “the door of the executive offices is open substantially all of the time to receive students...” For most other grievances, McKenzie provided additional context and evidence contrary to the students’ assertions. On the question of his seeking to increase the power and influence of the White South at Fisk by catering to White prejudice, McKenzie denied the charge, and pointed to his belief in Black education and Black potential as evidence. “He [McKenzie] has not only maintained that it was possible for the colored youth to measure up fully to the standards of the highest white university, but he has held that it is the duty of the institution to see to it that those standards are held up and maintained. Further, he has refused to believe even under advice from both races, that the colored people cannot maintain the same integrity and the same ideals of character which are expected...from white people.” *Comments on A Statement of Grievances Against Fayette A. McKenzie as President of Fisk University*, undated document, LHW Papers, box 23, folder 28.

about the plan from Black and White faculty and staff, the intervention was approved, and the meeting succeeded in diffusing further protest.¹⁷³

The campus calm was short lived. When the board of trustees arrived in Nashville in late November for its regular meeting, the trustees witnessed a demonstration of nearly one hundred students beating tin pans and chanting “Away with the czar!” and “Down with the tyrant!” As part of the board meeting, McKenzie invited the senior class and a committee of students to present their grievances. George W. Streater, leader of the student committee, presented the trustees with a statement containing eleven points, a more comprehensive document than the list of grievances the students submitted to the board the previous month. The revised version included several new requests, including implementing an athletic association, Greek letter societies, and a student newspaper. Although the trustees met with the students and promised to evaluate their concerns, they not surprisingly dismissed most student demands, although McKenzie did loosen the dress code slightly. The administration’s unwillingness to address what from the students’ perspective seemed like plausible requests further energized student and alumni opposition to McKenzie.

After minor student disturbances in December 1924, including students beating on garbage cans and cheering DuBois, the situation took a turn for the worse on 4 February 1925. Having recently returned from meeting with the trustees in New York regarding student demands, McKenzie addressed the student body in morning chapel and appealed for their cooperation in adhering to University policies. Suggesting that “one of

173 Undated document titled, *Disorder in Livingstone Hall, Monday and Tuesday, November 10-11*. No author. It is likely McKenzie drafted the document to send to the Trustees and perhaps Southern constituencies. LHW Papers, box 23, folder 28.

the most difficult things we have to do in this world is to secure perspective,”

McKenzie admitted “that is very difficult for each one of us to do; we are inclined to see things from the immediate angle that we do not realize many things that we ought to. It is a very difficult problem to secure action and still maintain the open attitude and the wide view.” He described the lessening of “vitality and virility” at the University of Wisconsin because of “laxity in discipline and morals,” and pointed to similar discipline problems at Ohio State University. McKenzie remarked there was “a whole series of problems and adjustments in colleges and universities which are not peculiar to one institution, but occur more or less frequently all over the United States and over the world.” Preserving these institutions, he declared, required conformity to regulations, and that the “the finest kind of conformity...comes from the honest endeavor of the co-operative heart – from the integrity of the willing heart.” McKenzie called on the trustees, faculty, and students to “get into our hearts what integrity means,” and predicted that “in so far as we are honest, our troubles will disappear.” At the end of his speech, McKenzie stated that “no changes so far had been made in the regulations affecting our code of conduct on the campus,” and he asked that students abide by rules “to which every honest person subscribes, not only in writing, but also in his heart when he accepts the privileges of the institution.” Finally, “from the heart,” he appealed “that there may be a conscience and a consciousness...that we are going to have, we hope, your co-operation in regard to the conduct of the campus...”¹⁷⁴

174 Dr. McKenzie’s Chapel Talk – February 4, 1925. Given by the Students as the Immediate Cause of the Disturbance in Livingstone Hall that Evening, which Led to Police Intervention, and the Arrest of Five Students, Statement No. 2, Minutes of Meeting of Greater Fisk Committee, 16 February 1925. LHW Papers, box 24, folder 24.2.

Despite its cooperative tone, McKenzie's chapel address failed to calm the restless student body. That evening, frustrated by the administration's refusal to act on most of their demands, more than 100 male students ignored the 10 p.m. curfew to protest, yell, and sing. Windows were smashed, furniture destroyed, and the students warned faculty and administrators not to quell the disturbance. According to Dora Scribner, Dean of Women, "the disorderly students overturned chapel seats, broke windows...", all while chanting "DuBois!" and other slogans. Alarmed at the protest, and mindful of the students' warning about faculty and staff intervention, McKenzie called in the Nashville police to quell the disturbance. When the police arrived, McKenzie furnished them with names of several students who he believed organized the protest. The accused students were arrested and charged with inciting to riot.¹⁷⁵

That McKenzie called on a White police force to establish order on a Black campus infuriated many Blacks in Nashville, and raised eyebrows among a few Fisk trustees. Nashville experienced an increase in racial violence the previous year, including the lynching of a young Black man just two months previous, and racial tension gripped

175 Wolters, *The New Negro*, 48. Differing accounts of the events on 4 February complicate verification of certain information. McKenzie claims that when the police arrived the boys were approaching Jubilee Hall in an attempt to involve the girls into the matter, and five boys were arrested. W.E.B. DuBois asserted the boys were sleeping when the police arrived and that six boys were arrested. Raymond Wolters suggests the boys had largely disbanded when police arrived, and they arrested seven students. In the aftermath of the disturbance McKenzie was questioned about his possible affiliation with the Ku Klux Klan. He stated that he was not a member of the KKK and was opposed to the organization. He also declared that he "refused the assistance of the Klan in the present disturbance." McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, 19 February 1925, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.; *Crisis*, April 1925.; Wolters, *The New Negro*, 48.; Synopsis of Statement by President McKenzie Before Greater Fisk Committee, 16 February 1925., Statement No. 1, Minutes of Meeting of Greater Fisk Committee, 16 February 1925, LHW Papers, box 24, folder 24.2.

the city.¹⁷⁶ Black leaders and the national Black press castigated McKenzie for bringing in White officers, suggesting it was a “stupid move,” and satirically declaring, “Mac, you went crazy!”¹⁷⁷ A few days after the disturbance, more than 2,000 people attended a mass meeting organized by the Nashville Negro Board of Trade to discuss the matter. A committee appointed by the group submitted to Fisk’s trustees a resolution containing five recommendations. Asserting that in calling the police to Fisk’s campus McKenzie had demonstrated “his inability to govern the school,” the committee declared that “it is our firm opinion that his usefulness as President of Fisk University is at an end.”¹⁷⁸ McKenzie recognized the opposition from Nashville Blacks in a letter to Thomas Jesse Jones, and perhaps consciously conflated the object of their wrath when he admitted that “from the Negro press you would think that the people of Nashville were practically a unit in condemnation of the university.”¹⁷⁹ In fact, Nashville Blacks condemned McKenzie, not Fisk.

Frustrated over repeated student protests during the fall, McKenzie hoped calling the police to campus would demonstrate a show of significant force, and convey to students the futility of further protests and the hopelessness of effecting change in Fisk’s policies. Having just met with Fisk’s trustees in New York and secured their support for

176 On 15 December 1924 fifteen year old Sammie Smith, accused of shooting a local white grocer, was taken from his hospital room by the Ku Klux Klan, hanged in broad daylight, and his body riddled with bullets.

177 A.L. Jackson, “The Onlooker,” *Chicago Defender*, 21 February 1925. Jackson was a member of the Chicago Urban League.; *Chicago Defender*, 14 February 1925.

178 Letter to Paul D. Cravath, 10 February 1925. LHW Papers, box 23, folder 19.1. The letter was signed by seven prominent Black business and church leaders in Nashville, including the President of the Negro Board of Trade.

179 McKenzie to Thomas Jesse Jones, 19 February 1925, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

his policies – as well as their refusal to accede to student demands – McKenzie felt emboldened by their continued faith in his administration, and likely anticipated their support for his decision to call on the police. Despite his confidence, however, he grossly miscalculated the symbolic – and potentially violent – action of bringing White officers to Fisk’s campus. McKenzie failed to recognize how his actions would further alienate him from the Black community and Fisk alumni, and how it created doubt in the minds of some trustees – if it wasn’t already present – about his efficacy as President. Although some trustees, including Paul Cravath and Kate Trawick, supported McKenzie’s decision, others, including Hollingsworth Wood, criticized his action. Three days after the disturbance, Wood admitted to “some sad and anxious conferences with John Hope and Dr. Moton,” and was “very anxiously awaiting for some real information beside what we see in our New York newspapers.” Remarking that, “if we had got our Alumni Committee functioning this would never have happened,” he told McKenzie, “it seems almost impossible to understand how the city police could be called in by a college group...”¹⁸⁰

Not surprisingly, McKenzie’s decision enjoyed strong support among prominent White businessmen in Nashville – indeed, the administration’s lack of flexibility in addressing student demands partly reflected a desire retain continued backing of Nashville Whites. Conversely, McKenzie lost much of his remaining support within Nashville’s Black community. He admitted to Thomas Jesse Jones that calling on the

180 Wood to McKenzie, 7 February 1925, LHW Papers, box 23, folder 21. John Hope was President of Morehouse College in Atlanta, and Robert Russa Moton was President of Tuskegee Institute, having succeeded Booker T. Washington.

police and the arrest of students “is of course the center of very much adverse criticism from colored people.” Yet, White people “endorsed the act with a great deal of enthusiasm.” He related the support he received from the White civic clubs of Nashville:

Everywhere I receive very strong commendation. At the Kiwanis Club they gave me practically an ovation when I went there for the usual Friday dinner. The Exchange Club asked me to be their guest...and I declined for fear of too much applause. The following week they renewed the invitation...and when I was introduced...everybody in the room rose to his feet and a great many yelled as well as a great many cheered with hand clapping. Some how I feel that never before in the United States has a white man in our work had such a hold upon a city as I now have in Nashville.¹⁸¹

A McKenzie close friend and confidant, Jones was also a trustee of Fisk, and McKenzie’s boastful characterization of his popularity among Nashville’s White business community sought to reassure Jones – and through him other trustees – that he and Fisk maintained White Nashville’s strong and unqualified support. At the same time, McKenzie wished to convey that future support – financial and otherwise – from Southern and Northern Whites depended upon a continuation of his present policies at Fisk. He informed Jones that, “it is clearly obvious that if I fail to receive unconditional support, or if I am asked to make modifications of conditions here at the time of the fouling of my authority, not only will the white citizens and the money of Nashville be turned in other directions, but the same will be true of the South as a whole and perhaps of a considerable part of the North.”¹⁸²

The arrest of Fisk students further mobilized the student body, and the day following the 4 February disturbance students walked out of classes. Cheered from afar

181 McKenzie to Jones, 19 February 1925, McKenzie TLSA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

182 Ibid.

by DuBois, and aided by members of Nashville's Black community and several Fisk alumni, the boycott lasted for ten weeks. Over 100 college students and a handful of Fisk's secondary students left campus, with many of them returning home or applying for transfer to other institutions.¹⁸³ Despite the walkout, McKenzie continued to enjoy support from some Fisk alumni and parents. The father of one Fisk student told McKenzie, "Your puritanical and straight-laced notions are correct. The best-thinking people are with law and order. Get more machine guns and stay on the job. We need you and the sacrifice you are making for our people." Another parent declared that "These rules and regulations at Fisk are similar to the ones under which we have reared our daughter in our home. May they continue!" W.W. Sumlin, a father of two Fisk students, remarked that, "Those of us who have had the good fortune to come under some puritanical rule, thank God for it...it does appear to have ever kept us within the law." He told McKenzie that, "As long as you and Fisk University stand against smoking, gaming, and debauchery of the young men students and against spectacular and suggestive dress and actions in the young ladies, so long will the Negro race continue to look upon Fisk as a beacon of light." Many of the supportive letters McKenzie received referenced the extent to which Fisk's first President, Erastus Cravath, stressed and upheld law and order, and complimented McKenzie for upholding that tradition.¹⁸⁴

183 As with many events surrounding the student disturbance and strike, accurate data are difficult to obtain. According to figures provided by the Dean, James Graham, who opposed many of McKenzie's policies, 217 of Fisk's 387 students withdrew as part of the boycott. Statement No. 13, undated. LHW Papers, box 24, folder 24.4.

184 W.L.B. Johnson to McKenzie, 6 February 1925.; Dr. A.W. Davis to McKenzie, 12 February 1925.; Sumlin to McKenzie, 5 February 1925, all in *Letters and Telegrams from Parents of Fisk Students, Alumni, Students and Friends-at-Large Together with Certain Statements Relative to the Recent Disturbances at Fisk University February 4, 1925*. Fisk McKenzie Papers Addendum, box 1, folder 1.

The Greater Fisk Committee.

At their meeting in November 1924, University trustees agreed that, “Fisk had now come to the third of three stages of growth, and that the development of the Greater Fisk required a still closer and more constructive use of the advice and counsel of the Alumni.” As a result, the trustees formed The Greater Fisk Committee to help provide leadership in mobilizing alumni support for the University. In addition to several Fisk alumni, the Committee consisted of McKenzie and three trustees: Kate Trawick, J.C. Napier (also a Fisk alumnus) and L. Hollingsworth Wood.¹⁸⁵

Designed to provide Fisk alumni a formal voice in University administrative matters, the Committee played a central role in investigating the student disturbance on 4 February. On 16-17 February, in conjunction with Fisk’s board of trustees meeting, the committee convened to further examine details of the uprising. After calling the meeting to order, McKenzie offered a few brief remarks and then withdrew to allow the Committee freedom in its discussion. The Committee first established a sub-committee to explore alumni representation on the board, and the remainder of the meeting focused on student and alumni dissatisfaction over the previous nine months, with a focus on the recent student disturbance. The Committee listened to statements from McKenzie, Fisk faculty, students, and alumni, White and Black citizens of Nashville, and representatives

185 Alumni participation on the committee included James H. Robinson of the Negro Civic Welfare League in Cincinnati, Rev. H.H. Proctor, influential pastor of Nazarene Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, Miss Sophia Boaz of Chicago, Dr. F.A. Stewart of Nashville, Mrs. Booker T. Washington, John M. Gandy of the Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, and Dr. Thomas S. Inborden, Principal of the Joseph Keasbey Brick Agricultural Industrial and Normal School in Bricks, North Carolina.

from Fisk alumni associations throughout the country, and also acknowledged receipt of several letters from Fisk constituencies across the country, many of which supported McKenzie.

The Committee found “a considerable divergence of opinion” regarding the facts and conclusions about the student uprising, but agreed that “for a considerable period there had been unrest at Fisk.” Not surprisingly, White Nashvillians felt that McKenzie “handled the situation wisely and commanded their respect and admiration.” However, former Tennessee Governor A.H. Roberts, who represented Fisk students and ex-students making claims against the University, felt that McKenzie had “made serious mistakes.” Several witnesses suggested that McKenzie had lost the confidence of Blacks in Nashville and throughout the country. Even those who approved of McKenzie’s policies and his actions on 4 February admitted that it would be difficult “to restore the confidence of considerable groups in Dr. McKenzie and his administration.”

After analyzing all available evidence, the Committee was “convinced that there is no race issue involved in the present difficulties at Fisk University.” Further, they concluded that “the strain upon the health and nervous force of President McKenzie had been very great; that he had been forced to act in positions of great difficulty and delicacy and that, whether or not his actions had been at all times wise, they had always been sincerely taken and in conformity with devotion to educational ideals as he saw them.”¹⁸⁶

186 The Committee’s report was presented to Fisk’s Trustees on 25 April 1925, a few days after McKenzie resigned from the Presidency. The report concluded with two recommendations. First, that “in view of the trend of thought of the world toward a larger liberty, the policies of the University in accordance with student life and activities be brought to conform to a more generous appreciation of this tendency in our modern life,” and second, “some method of alumni representation on the Board of the Trustees be developed...and greater efforts be made to enlist interest and support of the alumni of Fisk.” *Memorandum of Findings of the Greater Fisk Committee Presented to the Trustees of Fisk at their Spring Meeting*, 20

Shortly after the Committee issued its report, Hollingsworth Wood confided to a friend, “I want to assure you there was no race problem involved there [at Fisk], but merely one of individual temperament; if President McKenzie has been a black man, it would have been the same thing.”¹⁸⁷

Many scholars – but not all – exploring Fisk’s student strike agree the central issue involved McKenzie’s restrictive policies and regulations, not his attitude toward Black uplift and advancement. McKenzie’s dogmatic approach reflected supreme confidence that his administrative philosophy and execution represented the correct and appropriate course. Shortly after the student uprising he told Thomas Jesse Jones that, “I feel as though my remaining here longer is the only solution of the very critical problem now facing Fisk University and perhaps facing all education for Negroes, even though remaining here has become a very difficult thing for me and my family.”¹⁸⁸

McKenzie’s Resignation

The job of formally investigating student and alumni complaints fell to L. Hollingsworth Wood, Vice-Chair of Fisk’s board of trustees, and chief spokesman for the trustees. A Quaker and successful attorney in New York City, Wood was active in civic organizations promoting peace, civil rights, and education, and was a founding member

April 1925. LHW Papers, box 24, folder 23.2. It should be noted that a prior version of the Committee’s final report, drafted *before* McKenzie’s resignation, added a third recommendation: in the Committee’s opinion “it would be for the best interest of Fisk University and for the sake of all concerned, president, students, community, alumni and supporters, of Fisk University, that there should be a change in administration of the University at the close of the present year.” *Memorandum of Findings of the Greater Fisk Committee Presented to the Trustees of Fisk at their Spring Meeting, Draft No. I.* Undated. LHW Papers, box 24, folder 23.1.

¹⁸⁷ Wood to John Brooks, 27 May 1925, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 17.4.

¹⁸⁸ McKenzie to Jones, 19 February 1925. McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

of the National Urban League, serving as its President for 26 years. He served as a volunteer with several Black advocacy and charitable organizations.

Wood understood the complexity and challenges of Fisk's Presidency, and the importance of accommodating Fisk's diverse constituencies. "Our colored friends do not quite realize what they demand of a person in McKenzie's position and of his wife and children," Wood wrote to a friend. "I am sure if I took the presidency of Fisk and played golf or hunted or danced or dined with the cultured whites of Nashville that but few of my many Negro friends would keep unshaken faith in me and many would attribute sinister motives to perfectly innocent actions on my part."

More so than any other Fisk trustee – with perhaps the notable exception of William DeBerry – Wood observed the events of 1924-25 from multiple perspectives, including that of Fisk students.¹⁸⁹ He was not afraid to criticize McKenzie's approach, although he made sure not to do so in public, and he sympathized with some of the students' demands, noting their irritation over "some rather antiquated regulations as to dress and discipline," and conceding that "President's McKenzie's Scotch nature is a bit unbending." Admitting that it is "no bed of roses being head of a co-education, bi-racial institution," Wood confessed that McKenzie "has failed to keep ahead of his class in the

189 William DeBerry was the Black leader of St. John's Congregational Church in Springfield, Massachusetts, one of the largest Black Congregational churches in the United States, and the trustee most critical of McKenzie's administration. Shortly after Dubois's speech, the trustees drafted a formal letter "earnestly and vigorously support[ing] the policies" McKenzie has "been pursuing at Fisk." In refusing to sign the letter, DeBerry told Wood, "I must confess that I share to some extent with many others of the Fisk alumni a grave anxiety and fear as to the ultimate outcome of what they consider an ultra conciliatory attitude on the part of Dr. McKenzie toward southern sentiment as regards the Negro problem." He also related that "I do not agree with Dr. DuBois in all he is reported to have said in his recent address at Fisk nor do I approve of the maneuver in which attack on Dr. McKenzie was made." DeBerry to Wood, 8 August 1924, McKenzie Fisk Papers, box 3, folder 10.

problems of a minor nature in regard to discipline is I think a fact.”¹⁹⁰ When Mrs.

Booker T. Washington defended McKenzie in a long letter to Wood, he responded that, “I think we owe it the Alumni, as well as to ourselves, to investigate thoroughly the charges that have been made. So far, I have found that some of them are silly, some are groundless, but a few, in regard to the discipline, seem to me serious.”¹⁹¹

Wood applied to accusations made by DuBois and other Black leaders the same critical approach he used in analyzing McKenzie’s administration. Responding to accusations that Fisk was at the mercy of Southern interests, Wood declared, “that there has been anything even distantly-resembling ‘Selling out to the South’ is utterly preposterous. He [McKenzie] has accomplished wonders in gaining the good-will of the citizens of Nashville, of Vanderbilt and Peabody Colleges, but this ‘keeping-the-Negro-in-his-place’ cry is utterly unfounded.”¹⁹²

McKenzie and Wood generally enjoyed a good relationship, but Wood’s more sympathetic attitude toward the students and his willingness to dialogue with W.E.B. DuBois disturbed McKenzie. During summer 1924, Wood frequently corresponded and met with DuBois and others critical of McKenzie’s administration to address their grievances with Fisk and explore amicable solutions. Although Wood told DuBois he regretted that “your feeling of antagonism to the administration to have gone so far without bringing the matter to the attention of those of us who are interested in arriving at

190 Wood to Oswald Garrison Villard, 8 December 1924, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 17.4.

191 Wood to Washington, 29 September 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.2.

192 Wood to Oswald Garrison Villard, 8 December 1924, LHW Papers, box 20, folder 17.4.

constructive progress along the whole line of confidence and co-operation between the races before taking such sharply antagonistic action,” he harbored hope for a peaceful resolution. DuBois found little room for compromise, however, and their discussions yielded no constructive solutions. Rather, Wood’s methodical fact-finding approach frustrated DuBois, and further galvanized his opposition to McKenzie and Fisk’s board of trustees.¹⁹³ For his part, McKenzie viewed Wood’s engagement with DuBois as sign of disloyalty to his administration. Nettie McKenzie complained to Thomas Jesse Jones that instead of meeting with DuBois, Wood should be “holding up the hands of the president and cheering those on the job.”¹⁹⁴

Despite the trustees’ public support of his policies, in late 1924 McKenzie sensed board support waning for his administration. The trustees’ slow reaction in publicly endorsing McKenzie’s administration after the DuBois speech – and the lack of William DeBerry’s support when it was finalized – inspired little confidence. Indeed, Nettie McKenzie told Jones, “Such delayed endorsement meant very little.” Referring to DuBois’ speech, she remarked further that, “Dr. Moton said if such a thing had happened to him the Trustees would have been on the train at once for Tuskegee.”¹⁹⁵ Although McKenzie urged trustees to visit Nashville to attend functions marking the beginning of the 1924 academic year, only J.C. Napier and Arch Trawick – both of whom resided in

193 Wood to DuBois, 22 September 1924. For correspondence between DuBois and Wood, see LHW Papers, box 22, folder 17.2. In articles in *The Crisis*, DuBois criticized Wood almost as much as McKenzie, accusing him of ignoring evidence of McKenzie’s “incompetency” and suggesting that Wood advised the Greater Fisk Committee “to keep silent.” *The Crisis*, 9, No. 6 (April 1925): 248.

194 Nettie McKenzie to Jones, 19 October 1924, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

195 Robert Russa Moton was President of Tuskegee Institute and a Fisk trustee.

Nashville – came to campus.¹⁹⁶ Without the trustees’ enthusiastic and unanimous support of his administration, and absent their physical and symbolic appearances in Nashville, McKenzie privately recognized his ability to govern Fisk was permanently impaired.¹⁹⁷ The student boycott had sapped energy from the campus – not to mention tuition revenue from striking students – and all indications suggested it would continue until McKenzie resigned.

The events of 1924-25 exacted a significant personal toll on McKenzie and his family. Yet, he might have saved his Presidency if he took a more constructive approach to student demands. Instead, his steadfast refusal to compromise prolonged the student boycott, escalated protests by DuBois and dissatisfied alumni, and rendered ineffective Fisk’s educational mission. Kate Trawick, a Fisk trustee, member of the Greater Fisk Committee, and McKenzie’s close friend, likely informed him prior to its public release that the report of the Greater Fisk Committee recommended a change in administration for the 1925 academic year. Unwilling to change his administration’s policies and facing termination, on 10 April 1925 McKenzie forwarded to Paul Cravath his resignation as President of Fisk University.¹⁹⁸

196 Nettie McKenzie to Jones, 19 October 1924, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

197 McKenzie admitted to a friend that “the future looks very uncertain,” and “Fisk is gone if I leave now. To stay will be very hard.” McKenzie to “Dear Louis,” 1 March 1925, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8. Nettie McKenzie told Jones, “But to give all and know that the board neither understand nor tries to, is an impossible situation. If Mr. McKenzie is not the fan for this place it is time for us to change in June.” Nettie McKenzie to Jones, 19 October 1924, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

198 McKenzie noted in his resignation letter that “I have given perhaps the best ten years of my life [to Fisk] during one of the most difficult decades in the history of the world,” and “I shall always have a deep interest in the success of the institution which I have so long served.” McKenzie to Cravath, 10 April 1925, McKenzie TSLA Papers, box 2, folder 8.

Fayette McKenzie's presidency spanned a decade of unprecedented national tumult. Change within the United States – economic, racial, political, educational, and social – intersected and sometimes collided with McKenzie's personal philosophies of education and race relations. Pulled among competing interests, McKenzie sought to navigate the circumstances using a personal compass informed by pragmatism, sociological and educational theory, religion, and previous experience. In some cases, he adopted an approach of balance and compromise, willing to make sacrifices in pursuit of the greater good. His Triangle of Peace promoted reconciliation among the races with an understanding that slow progress through cooperation was more desirable than accelerated progress through violent and more uncertain means. He also understood the success of Fisk's endowment campaign – which would help secure Fisk's future as a leading Black University and legitimize Black higher education – required support of Southern Whites.

In other instances, however, McKenzie eschewed cooperation and implemented initiatives defined on his terms. In no case was this more evident than in his policies regulating student conduct at Fisk. He regarded college students – White, Black, and Indian – as largely incapable of appropriate self-regulation, and only in a strictly regulated environment could they develop characteristics of well-educated men and women.

Like many of his White contemporaries, McKenzie refused to appreciate shifting cultural and social forces within Black America, and on the nation's Black college campuses. Even if he had recognized their potential impact on Fisk, it is unlikely

McKenzie would have significantly altered his behavior. McKenzie's philosophy of minority education reflected a paternalistic approach common among White educators and philanthropists. Believing responsibility fell to Whites to create an educational system for Indians and Blacks that promoted minority advancement, McKenzie crafted a campus environment that promoted academic achievement, character development, and Christian sacrifice. If Blacks focused on academic achievement, behaved as Christian men and women, and ignored desires to agitate against Southern prejudice, they could earn the respect of Whites and advance the race. While McKenzie sought to prepare Fisk students to take advantage of opportunities to develop themselves as much as possible intellectually and religiously, his paternalistic tendencies left little room for individual ambition. When students resented the educational environment provided them, McKenzie, who believed Fisk faculty and staff made significant personal and professional sacrifices to help advance the race, became indignant.

McKenzie's unwavering commitment to law and order in campus administration, and his belief in the necessity of White support for Fisk, created a philosophical chasm with progressive Blacks. McKenzie needed to raise substantial support from Southern Whites, and their assistance required assurances that Fisk's educational environment, if not entirely accepted by the South, did not promote actions incongruous with the Southern racial hierarchy. Yet, McKenzie viewed Blacks' increasing restlessness and desire for self-determination – especially among college students – as threats to his control of the campus, which jeopardized Northern philanthropic and Southern White support. Having spent several years methodically and largely successfully cultivating a

campus culture amenable to these important constituencies, McKenzie refused risk their future support by acceding to students' demands.

McKenzie believed granting students greater freedoms would betray his work with Nashville Whites, and alter the institution in ways unattractive to Southern donors. Moreover, it might compromise future Southern support and put at risk collecting funds already committed to the endowment campaign. Interpreting DuBois' attack on Fisk as an attempt to remove White influence from Black institutions, McKenzie suggested, "The goal all of this approaches is the removal of white people from Negro education. Those who give to the endowment of the institution should have some assurance as to the permanence of the type of school to which they give."¹⁹⁹ Believing that successful completion of the endowment fund was crucial to Fisk's long term survival, McKenzie refused to alter Fisk's policies, perhaps fearing additional student freedoms would disrupt the peaceful and non-confrontational environment he wished to showcase. In the end, McKenzie believed accommodation to Black student and alumni demands was untenable – both practically and philosophically.

Scholars exploring Fayette McKenzie's tenure at Fisk observe his administration almost exclusively through the lens of the 1924-25 student protests and strike.²⁰⁰ Such narrow examination ignores and obfuscates circumstances central to an understanding not only of the events of 1924-25, but of McKenzie's ten year term as President. Fisk's founding by the American Missionary Association and its adherence to fundamental Christian principles informed in significant ways McKenzie's agenda for Fisk. The

199 McKenzie to Cravath, 8 June 1924, LHW Papers, box 22, folder 171.

200 Joe Richardson's, *A History of Fisk*, is a notable exception.

political, cultural, and social turbulence in the late 1910s and early 1920s also impacted his administration, and contributed to student dissatisfaction and protest. Northern philanthropic interest in Black education and Fisk's location in a segregated South profoundly shaped McKenzie's administration and Fisk's future. Finally, McKenzie's personal convictions about education and race relations both transcended and yielded to these forces during his Presidency. All these factors played a significant role in his administration, his decision making, and his responses to the student protests and boycott.

Often omitted in scholars' accounts of McKenzie's administration are his accomplishments at Fisk. McKenzie helped legitimize Black liberal arts higher education by providing Blacks the opportunity to demonstrate their intellectual capability, and he gained recognition from important White colleges and organizations which opened doors for Blacks' continued academic and professional preparation. Further, McKenzie worked to communicate to disbelieving and often hostile White audiences that if given the right opportunities, Black potential – intellectual and otherwise – matched White capability.

Apart from helping improve the perception of Black higher education, McKenzie significantly enhanced Fisk's campus, enrollment, and academic standing. Enrollment in college programs surged during his tenure, University revenue nearly tripled, and he modernized Fisk's infrastructure, installing a new campus-wide heating system, building new bathing/sanitary facilities, and expanding the campus footprint through select property acquisitions. Although critics charged McKenzie with firing Black faculty and

staff and hiring White replacements, the percentage of Black faculty increased from just three percent in the 1890s to 37 percent when McKenzie resigned.²⁰¹

The accomplishments in which McKenzie took the most pride – in addition to securing the \$1 million endowment – included Fisk’s recognition as a standard college by the Carnegie Foundation, the University of Chicago, and Columbia University, and the improvements in teaching and instruction that grew out of financial enhancements he secured for Fisk faculty. Despite his rather tumultuous tenure, McKenzie’s achievements solidified Fisk as a premier black liberal arts college, and laid the foundation for the University’s continued expansion and success in the next several decades.

201 Wolters, *A New Negro*, 58. Thomas Jesse Jones’ survey of Negro Education in 1916 provides enrollment information from 1914-15. *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in the United States*. Vol. I & II. Richardson provides some additional statistics related to McKenzie’s administration in his history of Fisk. Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 71-100.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

It seems sometimes that his [McKenzie's] life has been divided between white society, Indian society, and Negro society. Perhaps he has been enabled by great people to be of some value to all three societies.¹

– Fayette McKenzie

Fayette McKenzie was one of the few White men of the early 1900s to live among and work extensively on behalf of both African-Americans and Native Americans. As a leader in the Society of American Indians, McKenzie aggressively advocated for Indian legal and political rights. As President of Fisk University, he sought to provide Blacks with the same opportunities – especially educational and professional – afforded Whites. In both instances, he believed that when afforded similar opportunities and tools Indian and Black capability equaled that of Whites.

Although McKenzie's work on behalf of Indians and Blacks largely sought similar outcomes, the two racial groups' experience in the United States departed from each other more than they aligned, and approaches toward advancement for one group did not always translate effectively to the other. Their dramatically different narratives

¹ The quote comes from a 14 page handwritten summary of McKenzie's educational and professional career. Written by McKenzie in February 1954 when he was 81 (although the document is undated, McKenzie references the month and year in the text), he refers to himself in the third person throughout. Fayette McKenzie, undated, TSLA McKenzie Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

within American history, differing self-perceptions of themselves, contrasting white perceptions of each, and divergent agendas among leaders within each race presented unique challenges toward each population's socio-cultural and economic advancement in the United States. Further, the scope and interest of stakeholders in the advancement of each race differed dramatically.

Indians' relatively small population, their history as indigenous peoples of the United States, their tragic treatment by the U.S. government, and Americans' indifference toward their welfare allowed McKenzie to aggressively and publicly argue for Indian legal and political rights without alienating White opinion. Yet, many Indians cared little about such rights, or openly resisted them and, as a result, McKenzie worked as hard to promote hope and ambition among Indians as he did convincing White power brokers to grant Indians civic and legal freedoms. Indian suspicion or outright refusal to assimilate combined with White ambivalence over Indian enfranchisement created little political incentive for addressing Indian issues.

In his work with Black higher education, McKenzie encountered a highly ambitious Black population thirsty for knowledge and inclusion into a White society that aggressively and often violently resisted efforts at their uplift and advancement. Blacks' history as slaves, their significant population that raised White fear of their political and economic power, Americans' sharply negative stereotypes of the race, and Fisk's location in the segregated South required McKenzie to pursue conservative and less-threatening initiatives for Black advancement.

Americans' general outlook toward Indians and Blacks informed the scope and interest of stakeholders in the advancement of each race. Indian uncertainty over the ramifications of assimilation coupled with White ambivalence for Indian enfranchisement made mobilizing political and popular support difficult. With most Indians confined to reservations in remote and rural areas, most Americans had little interest in the Indian problem. Conversely, Americans' strong anti-Black sentiment led to significant political and popular opposition toward Black enfranchisement of any sort, especially within the South. At Fisk, McKenzie faced the dilemma of how to channel and manage Black hope and ambition without alienating White constituencies important to Fisk's success and future, yet who were largely opposed to aggressive Black self-determination.

In terms of public advocacy, approaches McKenzie used with Indians he simply could not effectively do for Blacks. Yet, early in his Presidency, Southern antipathy toward Blacks did not prevent McKenzie from more publicly agitating on their behalf. Not surprisingly, his advocacy did not engender support from industrial philanthropists and Nashville Whites, nor did it gain approval from Fisk's board of trustees.

"Educational institutions cannot wisely combine protest with constructive work," Thomas Jesse Jones told McKenzie in early 1918. "This, I regret to say, applies almost as much to the trustees as to the officers of the institution itself."² Avoiding protest and controversy transcended simply racial issues. In 1923, McKenzie hesitated to allow the Intercollegiate Socialist Society to visit campus, and sought Jones's opinion. "I am deeply interested in all the rights of labor," Jones told McKenzie, "...but I am convinced

2 Jones to McKenzie, 19 February 1918. Fisk McKenzie Papers. Box 3, Folder 15.

that institutions like Fisk University or the Phelps-Stokes Fund cannot cooperate too actively in the work of an organization that is inclined to methods that are aggressive.”³

Despite different environments, McKenzie pursued at Fisk similar strategies he employed with the Society of American Indians. He established administrative approaches that melded his personal philosophies of education and administration with priorities guided by institutional stakeholders, including philanthropists and trustees. His focus on high standards, character development, and achieving diplomatic solutions by working within the system characterized his work in Indian affairs and informed his approach at Fisk.

McKenzie insisted on high educational standards, believing intellectual achievement facilitated White respect and helped Indians and Blacks compete more effectively in White society. Although he never wavered from his commitment to high standards, the hope of obtaining White respect for Black achievement – academic or otherwise – met with little success and, in fact, may have increased antagonism toward educated Blacks and Fisk. Most Southern Whites resented educated Blacks, believing education instilled in them pride and ambition that ran counter to the subservience the South demanded of them. When speaking of Indian leadership and advancement, McKenzie asserted “advanced training is the chief tool of power,” and Whites instinctively knew that an educated Black population would eventually erode White power and hegemony.⁴

3 Jones to McKenzie, 26 October 1923, Fisk McKenzie Papers.

4 McKenzie, “The Indian of Today and Tomorrow,” 150.

McKenzie believed character an essential prerequisite for racial advancement and cultivation of broader and higher Black leadership, and a strong religious foundation facilitated character development. McKenzie sought to establish these traits primarily through education, and whether in Indian or Black settings, he advocated educational approaches that developed character through discipline, academic excellence, and economy. The Fisk Creed perhaps best illustrated McKenzie's approach toward character development and student conduct in an educational setting. Although written in part to discourage behavior that reflected unfavorably upon Fisk's administration during the endowment campaign, the Creed nonetheless stressed ideals McKenzie emphasized in both Indian and Black education, including scholarship, conduct, economy, and sacrifice.

McKenzie's work with the SAI reflected a pragmatic orientation with an emphasis on diplomacy. As the only White man officially involved in the SAI's organizational, strategic, and leadership matters, McKenzie needed to carefully and delicately direct his influence so as not to antagonize Indians distrustful of White intervention. He urged Society leaders to work toward organizational unity, believing that only through a strong united approach would Indians win political support for their interests. As a result, he sought to suppress organizational dissension and publicly communicate messages of unity and harmony. Asserting "the grave danger that when particular problems are attacked there are possibilities of harm," McKenzie suggested to Arthur Parker in advance of the 1912 SAI Conference that discussion avoid controversial issues and focus on general – and less contentious – problems on which the entire Society

could agree.⁵ Finally, McKenzie understood that creating White interest for Indian affairs – a prerequisite to Indian enfranchisement – required solutions non-threatening to White interests. He stressed the importance of Indians working within the (White) political establishment and socio-cultural environment to further their agenda, and believed that only through diplomatic means could Indians interest Whites in their issues, and only through working together would favorable outcomes result. “...You will secure policies to your advantage only as you can interest the White race in those policies,” he bluntly proclaimed at an SAI annual convention. “Any attempt to ‘go it alone’ is doomed to failure.”⁶ Despite his passionate advocacy for Indian rights, McKenzie understood that in a White-controlled political and cultural environment, solutions for Indian enfranchisement required White support and approval.

Despite White Southern attitudes distinctly more antagonistic to Blacks than Indians, McKenzie’s early years at Fisk reflected his egalitarian predisposition that marked his work with Indians. Racially integrated events at his inauguration, his protestations over segregated drinking fountains in Nashville parks and segregated seating arrangements in Nashville auditoriums, his work to secure similar arrangements for mentally incompetent and delinquent Black youth as those provided to White youth, and his desire to meaningfully engage with Black communities in the South and Nashville demonstrated in tangible ways McKenzie’s support for Black rights and advancement. Despite his well-intentioned efforts, these initiatives found little support

⁵ McKenzie to Parker, 11 May 1912, SAI Papers, Roll 4, Frame 1428.

⁶ Fayette McKenzie, “The Cooperation of the Two Races,” *The Quarterly Journal of the Society of American Indians*, Volume II 1914, 32.

among Southern Whites, and little traction among industrial philanthropists and Fisk's board of trustees. White ambivalence about Indian advancement mutated into open hostility over Black education and enfranchisement, especially within the South.

McKenzie's natural tendency toward diplomacy served him well in dealing with White constituencies at Fisk. White distrust of Black higher education, Fisk's location in Nashville, and the influence of industrial philanthropy required conciliation more aligned to White interests than Black concerns. Like Indian advancement, Black uplift required White toleration, and McKenzie understood the more aggressive approach he took in advocating for Indian rights risked failure when applied to a Black context. Instead of pursuing aggressive overtures that might infuriate Southern Whites, alienate Fisk's White constituencies, and retard future Black education and advancement, McKenzie sought to change public opinion by demonstrating Black intellectual achievement and professional accomplishments, and asserting the nation's need for a Black leadership class. Given racial tensions and increasing White and Black violence throughout the country – and especially the South – McKenzie believed Black cooperation with Whites the only viable strategy to achieve racial harmony.

McKenzie sought to avoid any form of dissent that could compromise Fisk's endowment campaign or jeopardize Fisk's – and McKenzie's – relationships with Fisk's key White stakeholders and constituencies. McKenzie viewed the campaign and relationships as crucial to Fisk's long-term survival and, more than that, important to the credibility of Black liberal arts higher education. By limiting student dissent through strict regulation of student behavior and focus on academic standards, McKenzie hoped

to communicate to external constituencies a campus environment committed to academic achievement and populated with students largely unconcerned about – or at least not interested in disrupting – Southern social norms.

Like his work with Indians, a strong sense of pragmatism informed McKenzie's actions at Fisk. He understood that advancing Fisk and Black liberal arts higher education required White toleration and support. Critics of McKenzie, in particular W.E.B. DuBois, harshly criticized his methods of student discipline and cozy relationships with Nashville Whites, but practical considerations informed many of McKenzie's actions. Fisk could not survive exclusively on Black support – DuBois admitted as much – and McKenzie's attention to the University's White constituencies and benefactors was borne out of practicality and a vision for Fisk's long-term success.

The Impact of Industrial Philanthropy on McKenzie's administration

Fayette McKenzie's vision to develop Fisk into a leading college in the United States dovetailed nicely with growing northern philanthropic interest in Black liberal arts higher education. The General Education Board targeted Fisk as an experiment in their funding of Black liberal arts higher education, and the Board required an administrator who could efficiently manage a Black college while effectively navigating the difficult socio-cultural environment of segregated Nashville. McKenzie saw in the General Education Board the significant resources needed to achieve his vision for Fisk. Despite the mutual benefits each party offered the other, McKenzie understood the GEB controlled the relationship. Indeed, GEB influence at Fisk transcended McKenzie, and Fisk needed GEB resources much more than the GEB needed Fisk.

McKenzie's attitude toward race relations largely coincided with more liberally-minded philanthropists. Far from the sinister motives attributed to them by New Left historians, most northern industrial philanthropists sought pragmatic and non-confrontational methods to improve race relations in America. Their acquiescence with progressive Southern White attitudes is less about malevolent intentions than a strategy borne out of practicality. "The glaring inequity [inadequate educational infrastructure] it [the GEB] chose to wage war against was not that which existed between the two races, but that which distinguished the South from the other regions of the United States," declared Raymond Fosdick in his 1961 history of the GEB. "This perspective led along a different path than the one we now travel; it bypassed certain problems we now consider fundamental."⁷

The General Education Board's growing interest in Fisk that coincided with McKenzie's arrival deepened during his first few years in Nashville. McKenzie's campus initiatives, including expansion of the curriculum, tightened academic standards, community involvement, and raising Fisk's academic profile, impressed GEB leaders and other foundation executives. With annual appropriations from the GEB and the Julius Rosenwald Fund totaling a significant portion of Fisk's annual revenue, McKenzie felt significant pressure to please Fisk's trustees and northern philanthropists. Although GEB executives largely refrained from intervening directly in the University's day-to-day affairs, their indirect influence exerted through the granting or withholding of resources increasingly drove much of the University's agenda, especially after announcement of Fisk's endowment campaign. With the beginning of the campaign, McKenzie's job

⁷ Fosdick, *An Adventure in Giving*, 324.

consisted primarily of raising money among Nashville Whites and ensuring an efficient campus environment that conformed to expectations of the philanthropists and avoided alienating progressive Southern Whites.

Industrial philanthropy's most direct influence on Fisk's operations came through annual appropriations to the University, without which Fisk could not survive. The University's reliance on GEB funding shaped important initiatives within McKenzie's administration that over time precipitated the events that led to his resignation in 1925. Specifically, McKenzie's increasingly restrictive policies regarding student conduct, and the lack of outreach among Black communities and commensurate increase in outreach to Southern White constituencies – all of which intensified after announcement of the \$1 million endowment campaign – represent more indirect measures of philanthropic influence at Fisk.

With the announcement of the endowment campaign in 1920, McKenzie tightened control of Fisk's campus through strict discipline and increasingly restrictive policies related to student conduct. Afraid the slightest hint of mismanagement or Black assertiveness would harm fundraising efforts, McKenzie's control and oversight of nearly every aspect of Fisk's daily affairs bordered on paranoia. "I am distressed that you seem to want to carry the responsibility for the investments as well as every other responsibility for the University," Hollingsworth Wood candidly told McKenzie. "The one criticism that I really have of your administration is your seeming inability to hand responsibility to other people and make them care for it without your worrying about it. I realize this comes from extreme conscientiousness on your part but still is a duty which we owe to

efficiency.”⁸ Despite Wood’s frank remark, McKenzie found it impossible to delegate, fearing that faculty and staff not in full sympathy with his policies would obstruct Fisk’s academic pursuits and impede the campaign’s progress. His suspicion of staff discontent regarding the environment at Fisk was justified – several disagreed with McKenzie’s policies and disliked his administration of the University. Until he had a faculty and staff in full sympathy with his policies, McKenzie felt he risked employee and student insubordination that would compromise Fisk’s campaign and long term success.

The philanthropists believed they needed the South’s cooperation to assure the long-term success of any broad-based educational endeavor, and they tasked McKenzie with leading efforts to win Southern support for Fisk. Although McKenzie opposed segregation and racism, he supported philanthropic strategies to win progressive White Southern opinion toward Black liberal arts higher education, believing that over time the progressive element would slowly win over more conservative attitudes. Yet, his increased efforts at mobilizing Southern support compromised outreach efforts directed at Black communities. Although Fisk needed the financial support of Whites to meet the GEB’s campaign mandate, few Whites in Nashville cared for Fisk, let alone supported the University. Conversely, Nashville Blacks – indeed, Blacks throughout the United States – looked to Fisk as both a tangible and symbolic example of Black opportunity, and they observed with great interest the affairs of the University. As McKenzie and the trustees more intentionally focused on generating support among ambivalent Whites, they

⁸ Wood to McKenzie, 5 August 1924. Fisk McKenzie Papers, Box 5, Folder 7.

alienated a population of blacks who took great pride in Fisk, even if they had no formal connection to the University.

Both McKenzie and the philanthropists believed a steady and cooperative program would over time naturally lead to Black uplift and advancement, and they approached the problem with a distinct long-term orientation.⁹ However, with a growing sense of urgency fueled by increasing self-determination, Blacks sought more immediate solutions for perceived acts of oppression, and they resented McKenzie's slow approach.

McKenzie had the distinction – or the curse – to lead Fisk when it became the first Black liberal arts college in the country to receive significant funding from northern philanthropic foundations. Just as the GEB chose Fisk as a test in substantially funding Black liberal arts education, McKenzie's administration provided a road-map for how to manage influential groups of Whites and Blacks in a highly charged segregated environment. McKenzie's cautious and conservative course served as an important guide for future presidents of Black colleges that relied heavily on philanthropic resources and faced similar, if not as polarized, decisions regarding how to balance the needs of their Black and White stakeholders. Throughout much of his administration, McKenzie often placed White philanthropic interests ahead of Black concerns, and his absolute intransigence in addressing student concerns – and the resulting student protests –

9 The GEB refrained from more aggressive intervention in Black higher education, fearing such an approach would antagonize the South. McKenzie, on the other hand, had worked for more than 20 years on Indian affairs and witnessed little, if any, real progress. Interestingly, in 1949, 25 years after he left Fisk, McKenzie lamented the slow pace of Black advancement in a letter to Charles S. Johnson, Fisk's first Black President. After praising Johnson for a statement he made on "contemporary gains in race relations," McKenzie admitted that "much remains to be done on both sides to increase mutual appreciation. Human evolution is a slow process." McKenzie to Johnson, 23 July 1949. TSLA McKenzie Papers, Box 2, Folder 8.

provided Black college executives an important reference point in trying to deal constructively and successfully with such circumstances.

McKenzie's Legacy in Black Higher Education

The accomplishments of Fayette McKenzie's presidency heralded an important new era in Black liberal arts higher education. By the time of his resignation, philanthropic interest in industrial education – the model espoused by Booker T. Washington – had fallen into disfavor among educators and philanthropists, and in its place philanthropists favored liberal arts education that prepared Black leaders and professionals. As the importance of industrial education waned and accreditation standards grew in importance, McKenzie's achievements at Fisk, including increased academic standards and recognition, helped establish a positive precedent for, and aided in the evolution of, Black liberal arts higher education. Put simply, McKenzie's accomplishments at Fisk helped legitimize Black higher education among White and Black educators, philanthropists, and accrediting agencies, and helped facilitate Black advancement and uplift.

McKenzie's focus on academic standards that led to Fisk's recognition by the Carnegie Foundation, Columbia University, and the University of Chicago helped affirm Black liberal arts education by demonstrating that Blacks could attain high levels of academic achievement recognized by prestigious White institutions. Moreover, the notoriety of Fisk's accomplishments advanced the important idea – theretofore unaccepted by most Whites – that Blacks could compete with Whites in the nation's best colleges and universities. Second, it brought important attention and resources to other Black liberal arts colleges. The path towards high academic achievement blazed by Fisk

helped to accelerate the road to accreditation for deserving Black colleges throughout the South. Although it would take until 1930 before the Southern Accreditation Commission accredited Fisk, the University's recognition by prominent White schools in the north helped pressure the Commission to begin accrediting Black institutions.

Completion in 1924 of Fisk's \$1 million endowment campaign helped assure the University's future and continued expansion, and represented a significant success for northern philanthropic involvement in Black liberal arts higher education. The campaign's success helped legitimize Black higher education among philanthropists and foundations, White and Black educational leaders, and accelerated Black higher education's movement – in both philosophy and resources – away from industrial education toward liberal arts education. The success of Fisk's endowment campaign ushered in a new era of philanthropic involvement in Black liberal arts higher education. Led by the General Education Board, northern philanthropies began slowly reducing appropriations to Tuskegee and Hampton, and increasing funding for Black liberal arts colleges, including Fisk, Atlanta University, Howard, Dillard, and Johnson C. Smith.¹⁰ Between 1925–1935, the GEB appropriated over \$5 million to Black liberal arts colleges and universities, a significant increase over the previous two decades.¹¹ As philanthropic funding to Black liberal arts colleges increased, appropriations to Fisk rose commensurately. Fisk's income almost quadrupled between 1923 and 1937, with foundation grants providing much of the additional revenue. By 1938, Fisk's endowment

10 Richardson, *A History of Fisk University*, 111.

11 See GEB Annual Reports, Rockefeller Archives Center.

exceeded \$2 million, a testament to the significant amount of foundation assistance channeled to the University.¹²

Fisk's pursuit of high academic standards, academic recognition among important White colleges, and completion of the \$1 million campaign helped stimulate similar efforts at other Black colleges that, in part because of Fisk's pioneering success, progressed more quickly. In this important respect, Fisk's achievements represented for Black higher education the beginning of expanding exposure, influence, and vitality. The ripples of Fisk's success quickly spread to other Black institutions, which attracted further funding, greater recognition, and contributed to an increasing profile and legitimacy of Black liberal arts higher education.

Finally, the Fisk student protests during 1924-25 raised the issue of Black leadership at Black liberal arts colleges. Although the Black press consistently called for Blacks to lead the nation's Black colleges, rarely, if ever, had a prominent White educator or philanthropist advanced the issue with any seriousness. Shortly after McKenzie's resignation, Thomas Jesse Jones, McKenzie's close friend, Fisk trustee, and philanthropic executive, expressed exasperation at the turn of events at Fisk. Uncertain of where to find a White replacement of sufficient administrative ability who could effectively balance White and Black interests, Jones candidly admitted that elimination of White presidents from Black schools is "inevitable and possibly Fisk must now go over into that realm." Jones informed McKenzie that he will shortly "Tell [Paul] Cravath, [William] Baldwin and others that I am for a completed colored faculty from President on

¹² Richardson, *A History of Fisk*, 111, 124. In 1938, Fisk's endowment exceeded \$30,000,000 in 2010 dollars.

down,” and that he will propose that W.T.B. Williams immediately be named as

Fisk’s new President. Jones continued:

I gave this matter most serious thought and feel increasingly it is the only way out of the present situation. I have just talked with [Hollingsworth] Wood over the phone. He says he is opposed to it, but it may be necessary. He further says Cravath will resign from the Board. Well, what then? Those who have been advocating this movement must bear the responsibility. I do not favor it, any more than I favor a complete Welsh faculty for Welsh schools – but if it is inevitable, let it come. I shall still work for all races and the Negro cannot stop me working for them.¹³

Although Jones’s suggestion was borne more out of frustration than thoughtful consideration (despite his assertion otherwise), that a prominent White educator and philanthropist advanced the idea of Black leadership at Fisk marked an important step in the evolution of Black liberal arts higher education. Indeed, just one year after McKenzie left Fisk, Dr. Mordecai Wyatt Johnson was named Howard University’s first Black president, replacing J. Stanley Durkee, who, like McKenzie, resigned amid student and alumni protest of his administration.

McKenzie’s Personal Legacy

Throughout much of his professional life, Fayette McKenzie followed the leanings of his heart. His passion for education and his devotion toward promoting racial uplift and advancement of America’s two most prominent racial minority groups defined his career. In retirement he continued his advocacy for marginalized groups, criticizing

13 Jones to McKenzie, 1 May 1925. TSLA McKenzie Papers, Folder 5. W.T.B. Williams, who Jones suggested as McKenzie’s replacement, was a graduate of Hampton Institute and Harvard University, and a former field agent for the Jeanes and Slater Funds, foundations who funded black schools in the South. At the time of Jones’s letter, Williams was a Dean at Tuskegee.

U.S. policy prohibiting entry into the country of persecuted Jews fleeing Europe during World War II, and defending the ethical and legal rights of convicted criminals.¹⁴

Yet, in his day-to-day work with the Society of American Indians and Fisk University, McKenzie's actions reflect a more analytical than emotional approach. Securing Indian rights and black achievement required an unfailing pragmatism that often required temporarily subordinating short term interests for long term gain, and at Fisk McKenzie was forced to sequester his egalitarian convictions in favor of approaches more sympathetic to philanthropic and Southern white interests. He believed that mechanisms designed to develop Indian and Black leadership and promote race advancement – with education the most important – required careful attention to ensure successful outcomes. With the Society of American Indians, McKenzie and Arthur Parker worked together to limit internal dissension and present a unified public platform. At Fisk, fearful that poor student conduct might alienate Southern White support, McKenzie worked fastidiously at ensuring a campus environment devoid of controversy.

McKenzie made serious mistakes during his tenure at Fisk, and his stubbornness in upholding campus policies either personally important to himself or perceived as important to Fisk's White stakeholders clearly led to his downfall. That he sacrificed his Presidency largely over his refusal to modify campus regulations suggests the significant influence industrial philanthropists played in McKenzie's administration. Still, Fisk's

¹⁴ McKenzie wrote Pennsylvania Senator James J. Davis that the U.S. Congress "could well afford to set up a commission...[to] deal solely with the task of bringing aid to the Jews of Europe," and that "restrictions on immigration of Jews to the United States should be lifted..." McKenzie to Davis, undated letter, TSLA McKenzie Papers, Box 6. A few years later he wrote Pennsylvania Governor Edward Martin seeking commutation of woman on death row who had the mentality of an eight year-old child. McKenzie wrote that "executing her would be contrary to ethical and legal principles." McKenzie to Martin, 26 September 1946, TSLA McKenzie Papers, Box 6.

environment partly reflected McKenzie's personality and educational beliefs, and the period's prevailing thought on campus administration and student conduct. The rule of law and order, character development, religion, and an emphasis on academic achievement dominated campus life as McKenzie sought to develop student achievement and development through discipline of the mind and body. Philanthropic influence caused McKenzie to amplify the focus on law and order and student conduct to such an extent that it became a distorted and disproportionate focus of campus life – for students, faculty, staff, alumni, and McKenzie.

Often lost in analyses of McKenzie's presidency that focus exclusively on the student strike are his ideas to engage with Nashville's Black community. Richardson notes that McKenzie's community outreach "did little to alter the view that Fisk personnel were unsympathetic to Blacks," and McKenzie was not one "to calm these fears." Yet, McKenzie's record of engagement with the Black community seems overshadowed by his administrative policies and the events in the last year of his presidency. In fact, many of McKenzie's most ambitious plans for Black outreach in Nashville and the Southland – establishing a night school for local Blacks, providing extension work in Nashville, offering free weekly musical concerts, and creating continuing education programs for Black teachers and clergy in the South – never materialized because of Fisk's precarious financial situation. Funding issues also hampered those efforts he did implement, including Bethlehem House, a settlement house where social service students trained. Thomas Elsa Jones, a white Quaker who replaced McKenzie as Fisk President, implemented some of McKenzie's ideas when Fisk's fiscal

situation improved. Jones continued Fisk's engagement with Bethlehem House, and created training courses for Black religious workers, an idea McKenzie first proposed in 1915. He expanded Fisk's settlement initiative with the formation of the Fisk University Social Settlement in 1937, and in 1946 partnered with Tennessee A&I College to establish an extension program for "functionally illiterate" Blacks in Nashville, an idea first envisioned by McKenzie thirty years previous.

McKenzie's tenure at Fisk should be evaluated in the context of time and place, and scholars analyzing McKenzie's administration have enjoyed hindsight that Raymond Fosdick suggests makes "unjust demands upon the past."¹⁵ The accomplishments, decisions, and events during McKenzie's administration are more accurately understood and appreciated when evaluated in a context that takes into account the role of industrial philanthropy at Fisk, Nashville's segregated and racist environment, the formidable challenges within Black liberal arts higher education, and the turbulent national events that occurred during 1915-1925. Far from the sinister motives ascribed him by most historians – a conclusion almost always based on the last years of his presidency – McKenzie's body of work at Fisk reflects vision and achievement alongside uncertainty and imperfection. The unflinching hope he harbored for Fisk University and its future as a leading liberal arts university, for Black liberal arts education, and for Black achievement and advancement remains an important and overlooked feature of his administration.

More than any White man of his time, Fayette McKenzie helped promote and further race advancement and leadership for Indians *and* Blacks. Despite immense

¹⁵ Fosdick, *An Adventure in Giving*, 323.

challenges that complicated his efforts, McKenzie believed achieving some race progress – even on White terms – was more desirable than no progress at all. That most scholars overlook or refute his contributions to Black advancement represents an unfortunate incongruity of history. Fayette McKenzie's achievements at Fisk University helped secure the institution's future as a leading Black university and at the same time legitimized and advanced Black liberal arts higher education. In doing so, McKenzie realized his vision of developing strong Black leaders and furthering Black uplift and advancement.

APPENDIX A:
LIST OF NOTABLE EVENTS IN FAYETTE McKENZIE'S LIFE
IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

31 July 1872	Born in Montrose, Pennsylvania, a small town in the far northeast portion of the state, one of four sons of Edwin and Gertrude McKenzie. Father was a merchant who lost nearly everything in the financial crash of 1876. In 1890, the family moved to South Bethlehem, where McKenzie completed his senior year in high school.
1891-1895	Attended Lehigh University, where he earned a B.S. and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa
1894	Attended summer courses at the University of Pennsylvania and studied with Franklin Giddings and Simon Patten
1895-1897	Tutored families of railroad officials of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and Pennsylvania Railroad
1897-1900	Taught French, German, English, History, and Economics at Juniata College in Juniata, Pennsylvania
1900-1903	Dr. M.G. Brumbaugh, future Governor of Pennsylvania and President of Juniata College, helped secure him a scholarship to pursue graduate studies in sociology and economics at the University of Pennsylvania. McKenzie taught Modern Languages and Mathematics at Blight School for Boys while pursuing his studies. Summers were spent with Brumbaugh fishing on the St. Lawrence River.
1903-04	Influenced by Patten, he elected the American Indian as the subject of his doctoral dissertation. Served as Principal Teacher of the Wind River Boarding School on the Shoshoni Indian Reservation in central Wyoming.
1905	Accepted appointment as Assistant Professor of Economics and Sociology at the Ohio State University
1906	Became a member of the Godman's Guild, a settlement house in Columbus, Ohio. Eventually served as President of the organization for several years.
1907	Organized a School Extension Society in Columbus and successfully unified the city's playground organizations in one entity.

1908	Awarded Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. Self publishes dissertation: <i>The American Indian in Relation to the White Population of the United States</i> .
1910	Named one of two “expert special agents” – the other was Roland B. Dixon of Harvard University – hired by the Bureau of the Census to conduct a census of the Indian population in 1910. The completed report, <i>The Indian Population in the United States and Alaska</i> , represented the most comprehensive study of Indian populations to date.
1910	Crafted legislation making Columbus’s playground association a municipal entity, which passed by one vote. McKenzie named President of Columbus’s playground commission.
1911	Offered position as Secretary of the National Playground Association at twice his current salary. Obligation to his aging parents precluded his accepting the position.
1911	Helped found the Society of American Indians
1912-1915	Served as Chairman of Universities and Social Welfare section of the State Conference of Charities and Correction
1913-1914	Parents died in August 1913 and February 1914, and McKenzie temporarily lost his eyesight
May 1914	Granted sabbatical in 1914-1915. Completed work on <i>The Indian Population in the United States and Alaska</i>
July/August 1914	Travelled to France to study with Professor Comte, who took disadvantaged Paris youth to the country to spend summers, and was in France at outbreak of World War I
Fall 1914	Served as an unofficial consultant to study the recreational needs of Washington, D.C.
1914-1915	Studies Indian education from Kansas to Arizona
1915	Accepted Presidency of Fisk University
April 1915	Married Nettie Evalyn Tressel, daughter of a Lutheran minister

9 November 1915	Inaugurated as President of Fisk University
1916	Awarded L.L.D. from Lehigh University
10 April 1925	Resigned as President of Fisk
Summer 1925	Accepted position as Professor of Sociology at Juniata College, and granted an immediate six month leave of absence
Fall 1925	Travelled in France with his wife and two daughters
Spring 1926	Returned to Juniata to teach
1926-1927	Appointed member of the Indian Survey Staff of the Institute of Government Research, and helped author the Meriam Report
1927	Accepted position as Dean of Men at Juniata (a position he held until 1929)
1928	Named Director of Extension Services at Juniata, and led development of the Altoona Center, which later became part of the Extension System of Pennsylvania State University
1931	Named Director of the Community Center of Huntingdon
1941	Retired from Juniata College
1 September 1957	Died in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

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